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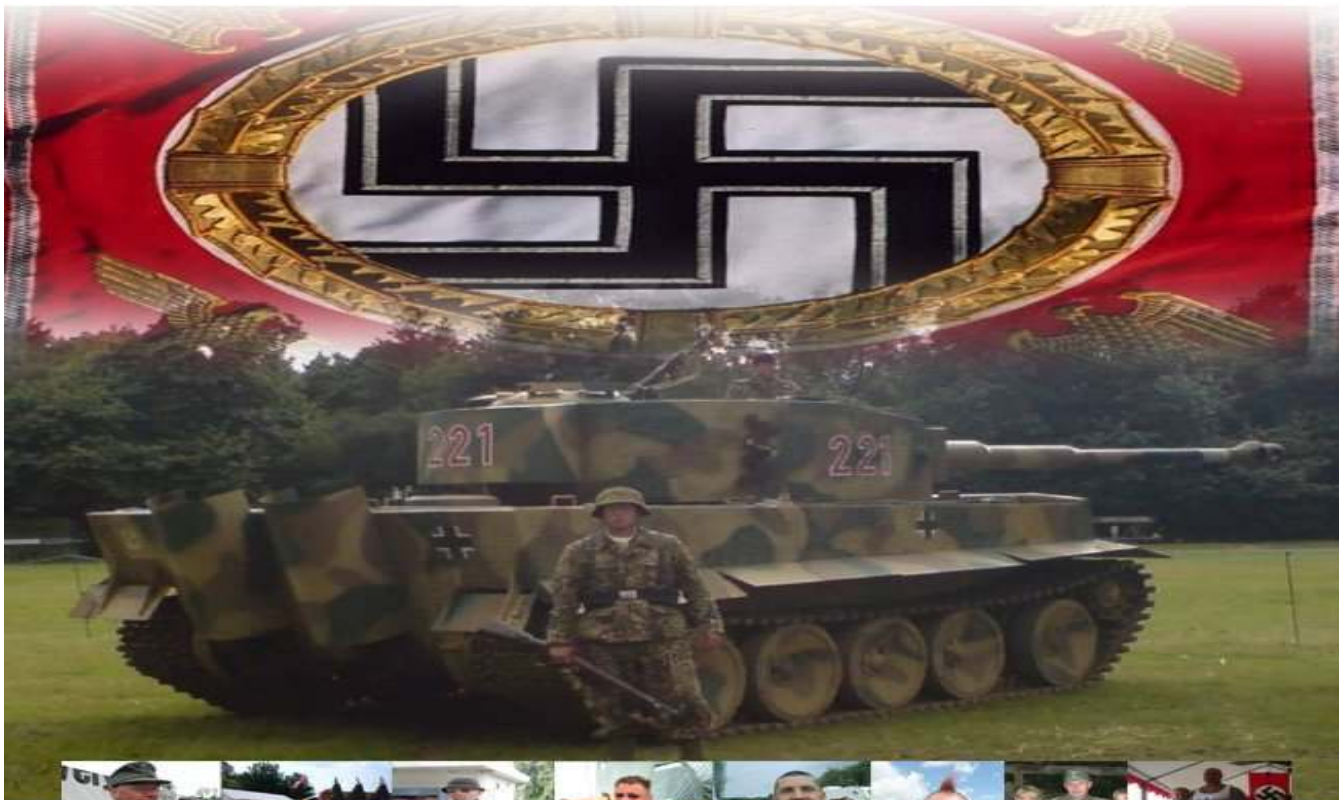
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# HITLER'S

## Third Reich

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# HITLER'S Third Reich

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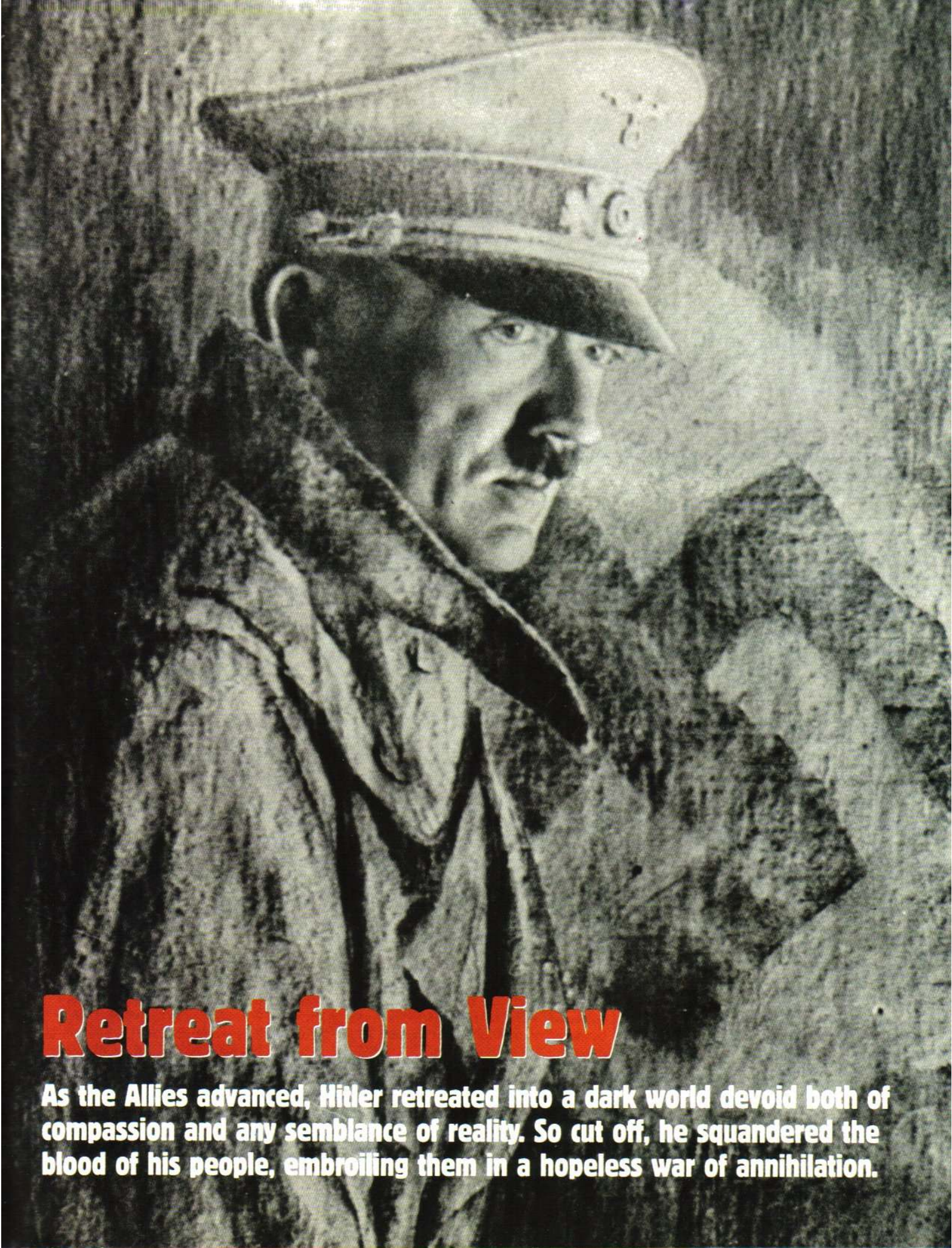
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## **Retreat from View**

**As the Allies advanced, Hitler retreated into a dark world devoid both of compassion and any semblance of reality. So cut off, he squandered the blood of his people, embroiling them in a hopeless war of annihilation.**





*Left: (left to right) Eva Braun, Hitler, Blondi and 'Sepp' Dietrich at the beloved Berghof at Berchtesgaden in the spring of 1944. Hitler was soon to leave the mountain retreat forever.*

*Above: The Führer's trousers on 20 July 1944. The bomb plot served to exaggerate Hitler's paranoia and further convince him that destiny had preserved him for some 'great purpose'.*

*Opposite page left: Dr Theodore Morrell – Hitler's physician for nine years – accelerated the Führer's mental decline by pumping him with a cocktail of amphetamines.*

referred to as "a ridiculous cosmic bacterium". Human suffering meant nothing to him, which is how he survived in Flanders and why he never appreciated how other people would react to his lack of empathy. Hitler never visited a field hospital during the Second World War. He left it to Goebbels to do what Churchill had done during the Blitz and tour the shattered suburbs in the wake of enemy bomber attacks.

On the outbreak of war, Hitler donned a plain field grey tunic and announced that he would remain in uniform until final victory. It was a symbolic end to his political career: from 1939 he would be a war leader above all else. Yet he continued to deliver major public addresses, giving nine such speeches during 1940. He managed seven in 1941 despite spending almost all the second half of the year at his new military headquarters in East Prussia. From June 1941 he was preoccupied with the war against Russia, taking on greater and greater responsibility until he reached

**H**ITLER'S TRAIN STOPPED to take on coal and water. It was November 1942: General Paulus' 6th Army was making its last attempt to capture Stalingrad before the iron grip of winter halted German offensive operations for another season. Believing that his generals were incapable of the necessary resolve to win the war in the east, Hitler had appointed himself supreme commander. Every day, he conferred with his staff to move coloured pins across a map that stretched from the Arctic Circle to the

Caspian Sea. But when he looked up from his papers that morning, he saw the human reality. A troop train had stopped on the adjacent track, at its windows the battered, bandaged faces of exhausted soldiers. Hitler ordered the blinds to be drawn.

## DRESSED TO KILL

Hitler was not squeamish. He had endured the horrors of the trenches in the First World War to emerge as a decorated hero. Hitler simply did not care. He had a profound contempt for human life, which he once





**Above: Mussolini, Goering and Hitler, three self-proclaimed military geniuses, debate strategy. As the German war situation declined, Hitler's absurd micromangement and 'stand-fast' orders proliferated and served to seal Germany's fate on the battlefield and at home.**

absurd levels of micromanagement. Hitler delivered five public addresses in 1942 and only two in 1943. As the military situation deteriorated, so the Führer withdrew from view. He spent no more than a few days in Berlin during 1943, dividing his time between Berchtesgarden and the 'Wolf's Lair'.

SD reports from 1942 indicated that the German people had not yet lost their faith in Hitler. They wanted to see him, if not at a spectacular rally then at least in a newsreel. Goebbels made a virtue of necessity and tried to portray Hitler as a majestic figure, preoccupied with the war and with no time for anything else. His lavish film 'The Great King', premiered in spring 1942 sought to associate Hitler with Frederick the Great, the celebrated warlord who had carved out the Prussian Empire against formidable odds.

## 'THE GREAT KING'

The 1942 campaign was intended to knock Russia out of the war by seizing her oil reserves. Although German troops penetrated deep into the Caucasus, the Red Army clung to Stalingrad, Hitler divided his forces, and by the end of the year Paulus' 6th Army was surrounded and Hitler faced the prospect of his first serious defeat. Long before the Russian counter-attack doomed the Germans at Stalingrad, Hitler had withdrawn from his generals, so angry with them that he chose to eat alone at the temporary headquarters in the Ukraine. On

24 August Hitler accused General Halder, Chief of the General Staff of cowardice: "What can you, who sat in the same chair in the First World War, tell me about the soldiers – you who don't even wear the black wound badge?" After an argument with Jodl two weeks later, Hitler brought in a team of stenographers to record meetings with the generals – to prevent them quoting his own words back at him. Halder was sacked.

There was one audience upon which Hitler still depended: the old Party faithful gathered as usual in Munich that November. When he made his annual address, the Allies had just landed in North Africa. It was common knowledge that the Red Army still clung to Stalingrad and that spectre of the Russian winter loomed once again. What was Hitler's plan? His speech was broadcast to the nation, but the general public waited in vain to hear any idea of policy. It was the usual tirade against international Jewry and the inevitable triumph of National Socialism, provided the German people kept the faith. He won over his Gauleiter, there in person to hear him at the party's most famous shrine. Yet the 'Old Fighters' knew they had burned their bridges and would sink or swim with the Führer. But the ordinary people wanted more than slogans. Rationing, British bomber raids and the loss

of loved ones on the Russian front were eroding the basis of popular support Hitler had enjoyed since the early 1930s.

Hitler had once been highly sensitive to any wavering of support and acted quickly and ruthlessly to any threat to his image. Now he refused to work the crowd any more. Perhaps, he mused, the German people did not deserve him. To his inner circle, 'the mountain people' as they called themselves because they always formed the core guest list at the Berghof, Hitler kept up a façade of optimism that would assume grotesque proportions by 1945. But the twin disasters of Stalingrad and North Africa ended any prospect of German military victory. Hitler rejected tentative peace feelers from Stalin in early 1943, determined to re-double the stakes rather than settle for anything less than outright victory. The battle of Kursk was intended to leave the Russians subdued for a year or so, but failed in July 1943 just as the Allies landed in Sicily.

## SINK OR SWIM

Hitler continued to distance himself from the German people during 1944. He divided his time between the Wolf's Lair and the Berghof, not even appearing to his subjects in newsreels. He delivered not a single public speech. On 24 February he addressed





*Right: Hitler, the evil enigma of the twentieth century, believed that Germany's fate was inextricably linked with his own. For Hitler there would be no surrender and for his people no choice but to join him in the abyss. They had failed him and in so-doing had lost their right to survive.*

*Below: A tired-looking Hitler meets with Mussolini on the afternoon of 20 July 1944. This, the 17th and last meeting between the two ailing dictators, had been prescheduled and Hitler doggedly refused to allow the bomb plot to force a postponement. The two visited Rastenberg to view the scene of the explosion, which had sadly missed its target.*

*Bottom: Hitler makes one of his increasingly rare public appearances. As Germans were called to make ever greater sacrifices, Hitler lost faith in the nation. Though they longed for his guidance, he left the tedious task of raising morale to any of his henchmen who possessed either the requisite charisma or semblance of respect among ordinary Germans. By 1944, such qualities were rare.*



a select audience of 'Old Fighters' in Munich on the anniversary of the proclamation of the Party's programme in 1920, but he refused Goebbels' request to have his speech broadcast to the nation. He made just two radio broadcasts, on 30 January and 21 July, the latter only prompted by the need to prove he had survived Count Stauffenberg's bomb attack. Even his sacrosanct address to the Old Guard at the Beer Cellar in Munich on 8 November was read out by Himmler. Hitler had become invisible, the great orator had lost his audience. He had no triumphs to boast of, just his familiar litany of blaming the Jews and promising 'secret weapons'. No-one outside the closed circle of 'mountain people' even bothered to pretend any more. SD reports piled up on Himmler's desk, telling the SS chief that Hitler had become worse than unpopular: he was deemed irrelevant. Hitler was seen as the last obstacle. Only his continued existence separated a German a people, exhausted by round-the-clock bombing raids and endless casualty lists, from the longed for peace.

## A STRANGE PASSING

Hitler spent the four months leading up to the Allied landings in Normandy at the Berghof. Secure in his mountain fastness, closer to the Wagnerian heroes of his fantasy world, he could ignore the future. Until the Allies were ashore, their grip on the Normandy beachhead too firm for even the SS panzer corps to prise loose. Plans for a deluge of rockets on the beaches failed to materialise. The German army fought with diabolic skill to hold back the inevitable, but the simultaneous collapse of the Ostheer under a succession of hammer blows from the Red Army ended the dream. Military leaders were summoned to meetings at regular intervals. The Wolf's Lair in East Prussia received additional protection against air attack. But the air of unreality persisted even as strategic options were deliberated in the wake of D-Day. (The spectre at the feast was none other than Claus von Stauffenberg, who attended both the last two conferences on 6 and 11 July.)

Late on the night of 13-14 July, Hitler walked the corridors of the Berghof. He kissed Dr Brandt's wife goodbye and lingered before the portraits in the great hall. He knew the game was up, even if he refused to admit it to his entourage. He flew to East Prussia on 14 July, never to return. His arrival six months later in Berlin was unannounced and unnoticed. When Goebbels broadcast news of his death, it came as news to most Berliners that he had even been in the capital.







# CONTEMPT FOR LIFE



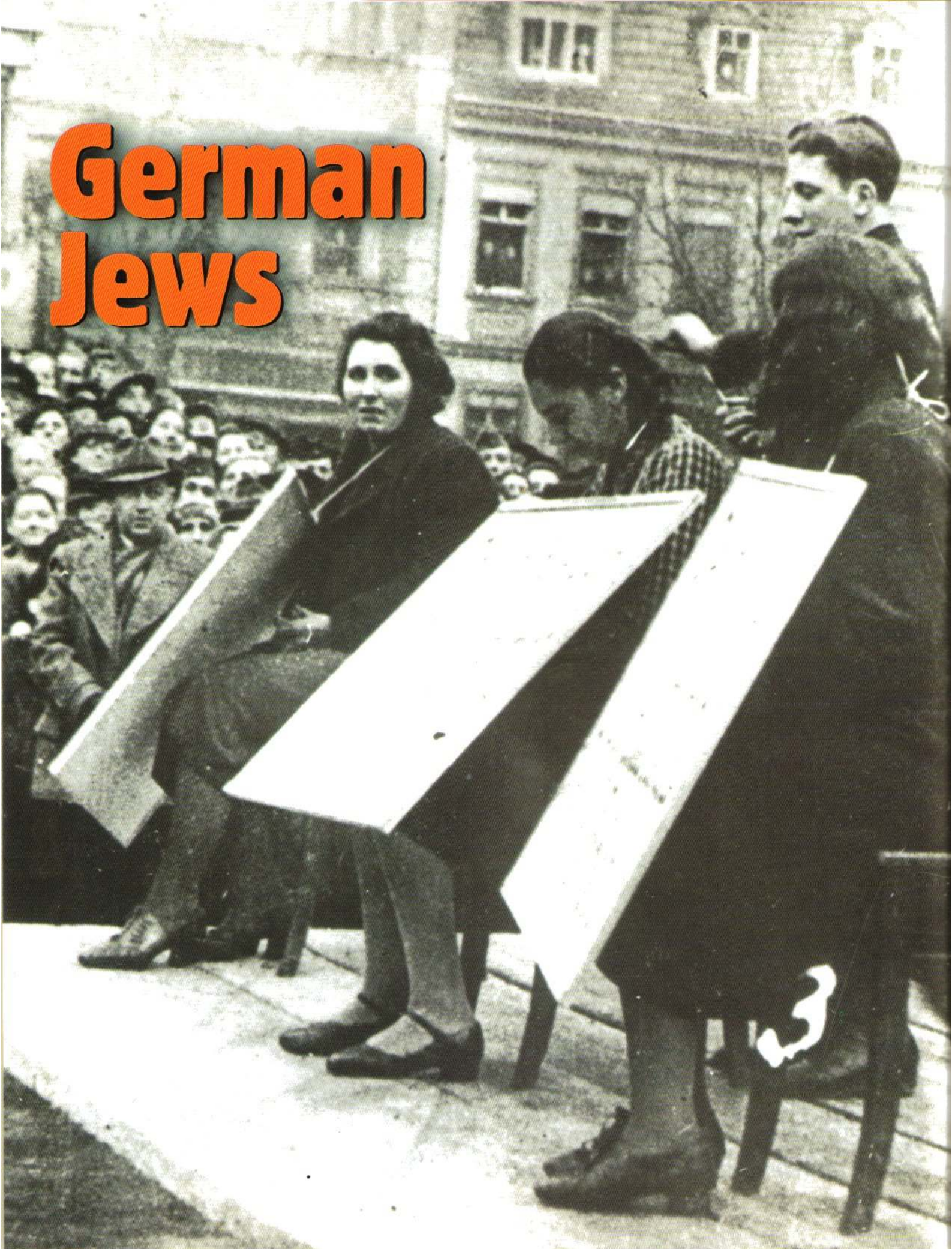
*Above and left: Hitler had a profound contempt for humanity. He described a human being as no more than a ridiculous 'cosmic bacterium'. The millions of Germans that he murdered were for him merely an abstraction.*

*Above: Goebbels repeatedly pleaded for Hitler not to cut himself off from the masses, from whom his support ultimately derived. But Hitler never once visited his ruined cities.*





# German Jews







Opposite page: Organised Jewbaiting was a frequent public spectacle in Austrian towns following the Anschluss of March 1938. Here, Jews in Linz are shaved and forced to wear a placard reading: "I have been ostracised from the national community".

Left: The Nazis' campaign of anti-Semitism began with a boycott of Jewish-owned shops. Graffiti and watchful SA men encouraged the German public to shop elsewhere.

Below: On 5 October 1937, a law was passed which invalidated all Jewish passports that were not stamped with a red letter 'J' (for Jude). This was yet another stage in the gradual isolation of German Jews which eventually led to the ghettos and finally to the gas chamber.

## The small Jewish community of Germany was the first to bare witness to the true nature of Hitler's Nazis.

**F**ROM THE accession of Adolf Hitler to power in 1933 to the fall of the Third Reich, National Socialism meant, in turn, prejudice, legal discrimination, oppression, deportation and finally death.

The most far sighted of Germany's 600,000 Jews understood the threat Nazism posed and sought by any means to emigrate. But hundreds of thousands of assimilated Jews – German speaking, of German culture and in many cases with years of service to the German state – believed that their demonstrated loyalty to their country would protect them. The mainstream Jewish community believed that their future lay in Germany, and the majority were hostile to the Zionist solution of emigration to Palestine.

As German citizens, the Jews pinned their hopes on the law. But the law changed. It was used to create and codify their status as pariahs, eventually stripping away the citizenship in which they had placed such faith.

### KRISTALLNACHT

The nationwide pogrom that took place in November 1938, the infamous *Kristallnacht* finally brought home to even the most assimilated of German Jews that they had little future in Hitler's Reich. Most of Germany's synagogues were desecrated or burned, and over 7,000 Jewish businesses were looted and wrecked. Jewish homes, schools, hospitals and cemeteries were destroyed, and more than 26,000 Jews were placed into 'Protective custody'.

After *Kristallnacht*, most Jews knew that there was no hope. A wave of suicides occurred, and those that could, tried desperately to leave the country. The emigration continuing even after the outbreak of war. The fall of France in 1940 blocked the last main emigration route from Germany. 400,000 Jews had left the Nazi State since 1933, but at least 200,000 were still living in Greater Germany – Germany, Austria and the Sudetenland – at the outbreak of war.

The already restrictive anti-Semitic laws that had been



introduced in the years since 1935 were extended. Jews were forbidden to own a wide variety of goods, from radios to cars and bicycles. They were ordered to hand any such items over to the police.

In August 1937, the first legislation was imposed which marked Jews out. Jews had to make themselves easily identifiable by naming their newborn children from a list of prescribed names. If the parents own names were not on the list they had to take a second first name – Israel for men and Sara for women.

### JEWISH GHETTOS

The Nazis established no official ghettos in Germany proper. But all-Jewish communities emerged by default, there being strict limits on where a Jew was allowed to reside.

Jews were subject to a harshly restrictive curfew, which was made easier for the police to enforce by the requirement from the autumn of 1941 that all Jews over the age of six were to wear a prominent yellow 'Star of David' on their clothing. At the same time, Jews were forbidden to use public transport. Eventually, Jews were only allowed to live in *Judenhäuser*, or Jewish houses – among the only property which could still be owned by Jews, and into which all Jews evicted from 'Aryan'-owned property were moved, by force if necessary.

The majority of Germans were wholly in accord with the repressive anti-Semitic measures introduced by the Nazis before the war, but only a minority actually urged the annihilation of the Jewish race, or even the expulsion of Jews from Germany.

The initial Nazi-inspired





**Above right:** Kristallnacht, 9 November 1938, devastated the German Jewish community. As well as extensive damage to property, many Jews were raped and 91 murdered. The Nazis not only confiscated RM100 million of insurance pay-outs but also imposed a RM1 billion levy on Jews who were held responsible for the outrage.

**Above:** A German woman is humiliated by SA over her relationship with a Jew. The sign reads: "I am the biggest pig, fit only to be with Jews".

**Below:** A Jewish family stand out from the crowd. The Star of David they are forced to wear makes them conspicuous targets for abuse. Their daughter is spared the humiliation until she turns six.



boycott of Jewish businesses in 1933 had failed to win general support, and SA Stormtroopers, organised by the Gestapo did most of the damage to synagogues and shops during *Kristallnacht*. Many Germans, particularly in smaller towns, passively opposed the Nazi regulations by continuing to shop in Jewish stores and by patronising Jewish tradesmen even after the outbreak of war.

Although far too little to be classed as opposition to the government anti-Semitic line, such small positive actions led a few German Jews, generally the young and the hopeful, to feel a tiny touch of optimism. They experienced the compassion of ordinary German people, and felt little fear – largely because they were already beyond the pale of German society. Indeed, these optimists often felt that non-Jewish Germans had more to fear from Nazi repression, because they had more to lose.

## RITUAL HUMILIATION

Most German Jews were less sanguine. The experience of the part-Jewish schoolgirl, singled out by the teachers and made to sit alone at the front of the class was not an isolated incident, and the ostracism of Jews by former friends and neighbours was the norm. But the harassment and oppression of the pre-war years became an all-embracing terror after 1941, when a knock on the door was often the first step in

transportation to the east.

The optimists were encouraged by the judiciary's apparent intention to treat all Germans, Aryan and Jews, alike before the law. In the summer of 1939, a Frankfurt court ordered a Jewish woman for language courses she had paid for but had not been able to attend. In the very next case, the court found against the wife of a party member who had refused to pay for goods bought from a shop. The woman had claimed she would not pay because the shop owner was a Jew, which she had not known at the time. The court insisted that full restitution be made to the shopkeeper.

## NO HOPE

However, this show of impartiality was misleading. A memo issued by the Ministry of Justice in June 1939 stated: "Intervention in the economic situation of Jews by extra-legal means should be avoided. It is undesirable, on social welfare grounds, to let the Jews become completely impoverished. Therefore Jews should be able to turn to the courts and have rulings enforced when cases are found in their favour." But the memo went on: "The exclusion of the Jews from the German economy must be completed according to the plan and within existing regulations. Businesses and other properties in the possession of Jews, which allow them a certain



economic influence, will become German property in accordance with the prescribed ways."

In effect, the courts were saying that to completely dispossess the Jews would simply make them a burden on the state. Those who could contribute to the German economy should be allowed to do so, and they would be expected to pay for their own upkeep until a 'Final Solution' to the Jewish problem could be brought into effect.

## CHANGING FACES

By the time the Holocaust began its full horrific course, the Jewish population of Germany had changed beyond measure. Those young enough and energetic enough had emigrated. The remnant were poor or elderly. By June 1940 nearly 60% of the Jews of Germany were aged over 45.

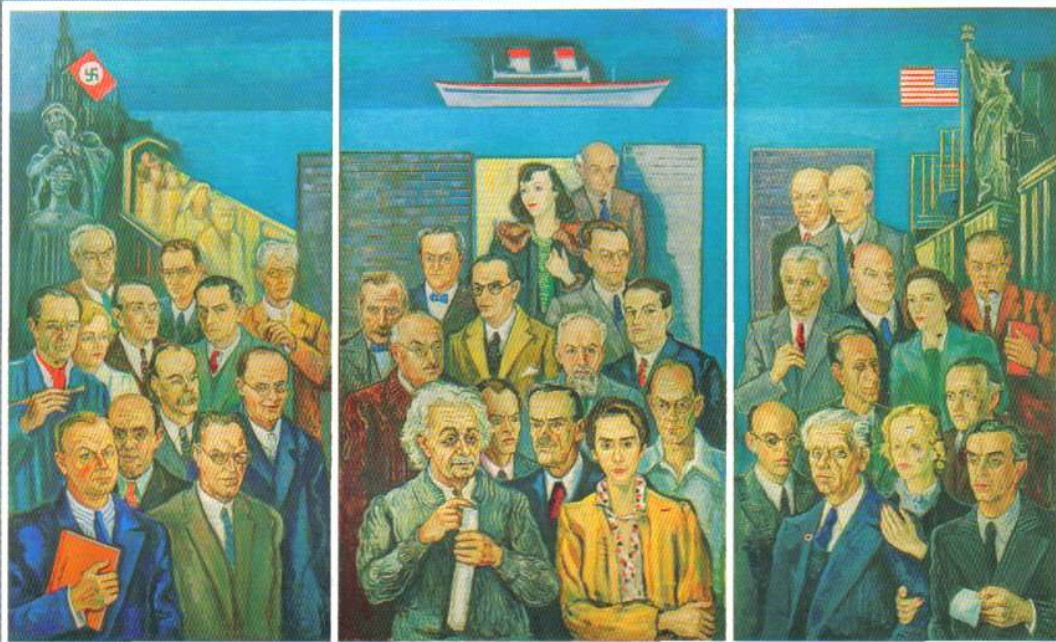
Systematic deportation of German Jews began in September 1941. In the first stages, they were sent to ghettos in Poland, Belorussia and in the Baltic States. Elderly and prominent Jews, and those who had served in the military during the First World War, went to the 'model' ghetto at Theresienstadt. The deportations continued until early in 1943. Most sent east died in that year, with the clearing of the ghettos, though the last transports went direct to the death camps.

## AFTER THE STORM

By the time the transports ended there were only about 15,000 Jews remaining in Germany, with a further 7,000 in Austria. Most of those who remained were classed as mixed-race, or were married to non-Jews. However, even they were not safe, and attempts to eliminate the last remnants of the Jewish race in Germany continued almost to the end of the war. But not all Jews were sent to the ghettos and death camps. A few thousand remained in hiding in Germany through the war, using forged papers or the shelter offered by the few 'Aryan' friends who refused to ignore what was happening to the Jews.

# Freedom at a Price

**B**ETWEEN 1933 and 1939 (when the borders were closed), over half of Germany's Jewish population fled from Nazi persecution. Despite the increasing difficulties of living in Germany, emigration was not an easy option. To leave meant losing everything. In 1933, emigrants were permitted to take no more than RM200 with them. This figure was reduced to a mere RM10 by 1938. All property had to be surrendered without compensation. The fact that so many left everything reflects the very real threats they faced at home. But deciding to leave was not the only hard choice; German Jews who chose to emigrate were not welcomed by the rest of the world and some could find nowhere to go. One man looking for a place of refuge, famously asked his advisor: "Would you perhaps have another globe?"



Above: 'The Intellectual Emigration' by Arthur Kaufmann. Dictatorships have an intolerance of original or 'subversive' thinking. Amongst the refugees were the author Thomas Mann and the most famous of all, Albert Einstein.

Below: After the horrors of Kristallnacht, a family of German Jews make their way to England. They faced an uncertain future with no money or home. But despite their troubles their fate was certainly preferable to those who stayed behind.



Above and above right: Albert Einstein (above) was among thousands of Jews who sought a new life in America. His genius and research into the atom bomb was a great loss to Germany, but assured him financial security when he arrived. Many found their skills were less transferable - they had lost their primary resource, their ability to communicate. Without English most found getting a good job impossible.



*Hitler thought that the undeniable quality of German products would compensate for quantitative inferiority. He was wrong.*

# The war economy

**WWII was a war of attrition. The country that built the most weapons would inevitably win. Germany was not that country.**





**G**ERMANY WAS THE industrial centre of the Axis powers and the economic powerhouse of continental

Europe. It was the only Axis nation that could come anywhere near to matching the prodigious output of the Soviet and American economies.

After the stunning military successes of 1939–41, Nazi Germany also controlled the resources and manufacturing facilities of occupied Europe. The raw materials and factories of Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Luxembourg, Denmark and Norway all lay under German rule. Yet the Allies continued to out-produce the Germans in almost all spheres of military equipment, and by late 1942 they were building three times as many aircraft and tanks.

## PRODUCTION RACE

There can be little doubt that throughout the war, Hitler's Germany produced far fewer weapons than its resources in materials, manpower, technical and scientific skill and manufacturing capability could have achieved. Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States had access to a massive supply of raw materials, but it was not simply a question of resources.

Up until 1943, despite her smaller economy, Britain out-produced Germany and its empire in the manufacture of almost all major weapon systems. In 1942, due to the rapid German advance across her territory, the Soviet industrial base had been reduced to a size even smaller than that of Britain, yet its armament industry produced half as much again as Germany's between 1942 and 1945. As historian Richard Overy writes in 'War and Economy in the Third Reich': "however much the statistics may mask differences in policy and circumstances, this is still a significant contrast."

The contrast is even more remarkable since, before the

outbreak of war, the German economy was probably better prepared for conflict than any other in Europe. Rearmament had begun in 1933 and accelerated from 1936 onwards. But, she was rearming from a very low base. As far as her armed forces were concerned, the war in Europe began three or four years prematurely. While Hitler mobilized the armament factories and civilian industries after the outbreak of war, in an attempt to make up the difference, there was no total economic mobilization in preparation for a long war. The peacetime war economy was followed by a peace-like wartime economy. By and large business as usual prevailed; this was mainly because Hitler, in the early days, was acutely aware of public opinion. He did not want the German war effort to be crippled by revolution at home as had happened in 1918.

Nonetheless, by the summer of 1941 more than half of the German workforce was engaged in military construction. This was a higher level of commitment than Britain in 1941 and higher than that of the United States throughout the war. Furthermore, Germany had access to the resources of conquered Europe, including almost the entire European coal and steel industry, as well as the workers and manufacturing capability. Despite this, the output of armaments was little higher two years after the outbreak of war than it had been at the start. The situation was compounded in mid-1941, when Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa. This drew him into a terrible war of attrition against the Soviet Union where manufacturing capabilities and economic output would be as important, if not more so, than skill on the battlefield.

## NOT NEARLY ENOUGH

There are various reasons for the initial failure to increase production levels in an economy as advanced as that of mid-



*Above: Allied estimates of the disruption caused to German industry up to 1943, through bombing, were wildly optimistic. The Butt report of 1942 calculated that only one in four bombers dropped their loads within 8km of the target area. However bombing ensured that 75 percent of the German 88-mm guns were committed to air defence.*

twentieth century Germany. Bureaucracy was confused and stultifying, and Germany did not possess a single central administrative authority to coordinate the war effort.

The Council of Ministers for Reich Defence – the responsibility of Hermann Goering – had been formed in August 1939 and might have played a useful role in coordinating civilian and military and industrial needs. However, it had been disbanded after six meetings. Goering did not want to damage his special relationship with Hitler by creating problems.

Although Hitler could order the types of weapons he thought necessary, without a centrally planned economy the implementation of his proposals was somewhat erratic. There was no straight line of command between Führer and factory. In between lay a web of ministries, plenipotentiaries and Party commissars, each with their own apparatus, interests and rubber

stamps, producing a greater than the usual weight of bureaucratic inertia. At the end of the line was a business community most of whom remained wedded to entrepreneurial independence. They resented the jumbled administration, the corrupt Nazi Party hacks and the endless form-filling, which only stifled what voluntary efforts they might have made to transform the war economy.

## NO MASS PRODUCTION

Germany never really mastered the modern concept of mass production. The German armed forces had traditionally worked with smaller firms and skilled craftsmen who could produce sophisticated weaponry. Industry had always been strong in terms of quality skilled workmanship and advanced technology – virtues that were demanding in time and material. Sophistication was preferred to high-quantity production. It ensured excellent workmanship but did not produce the numbers required.





*Above: Conscripted labour worked under appalling conditions, deprived of food and sleep. Often the factory became their home. In these conditions they were unlikely to work efficiently.*

*Left: An American poster encouraging women to join the war effort. But Hitler wanted to keep women out of the workplace and a major source of manpower (sic) was overlooked.*

*Below: Workers from occupied countries were conscripted by the Reich for forced labour to replace men at the Front. Germans were ruthless in their exploitation of this cheap labour pool. These Polish boys are photographed in the summer of 1940.*



The need for more and more men to fill the ranks of the Wehrmacht led to chronic labour shortages. The Nazi regime saw two possibilities: to increase hours and hold down wages, which had previously met with little success; or to make use of new labour resources. There were two sources of labour that Nazi Germany could tap: women and foreign workers.

## WOMEN AT WORK

The extensive mobilization of women that proved so successful in the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union did not occur in Germany. Nazi ideology emphasized the woman's role as wife and mother rather than worker. Half-hearted efforts to encourage women into the factories were largely unsuccessful. By the eve of the Russian campaign in 1941, the numbers of women employed in German industry was scarcely higher than at the start of the war. The number of economically active women did not rise above the level of May 1939 until 1943, when Hitler's deputies finally overrode his opposition to drafting women into war work. All citizens had to register for employment, but women found it easy to evade employment because officials were often reluctant to enforce the measure.

Though the recruitment drive ultimately failed, many female Nazis despaired; having supported a powerful leader who had placed strong families at the centre of Nazi ideology they felt betrayed. It contradicted Nazi policy which maintained that women's primary function was to breed children for the Reich.

Far more than the employment of women, German war production relied heavily on foreign labour. By 1944 foreign workers amounted to 21 percent of the industrial workforce. The Germans also drew on concentration camp labour; in 1944 their number rose from 30,000 to over 300,000. The conditions for foreign workers

were by no means identical. The concentration camp inmates were worked to death in appalling conditions. The post-war Nuremberg Trials described this as a policy of "extermination through work." The eastern workers, the Russians and the Poles, were poorly treated, even if they were not worked to death; almost universally their physical health was ruined. Workers from countries such as Denmark and France were not so horrendously treated, yet even they lived in squalid conditions on low pay and were bullied and victimized by German workers, whose conditions in the industrial regions of Germany were also growing worse. In any form, foreign labour was no real substitute for skilled German workers.

Hitler had recognized the problem of the military interfering in industry and he berated it for burdening production with unnecessarily complex demands. Hitler wanted "more primitive, robust construction" and the introduction of "crude mass production" methods. However, it took the appointment of Albert Speer as Minister of Armaments to bring German industrial production to something like its proper potential. He established a centralized planning board and rationalized arms production. He closed down small firms and redistributed the released skilled labour. He decided upon the allocation of raw materials and resources at a national level. He set up an interlocking system of production for major weapon systems and planned and supervised all military production.

## SPEER'S MIRACLE

Speer's reforms resulted in large improvements in efficiency, coordination and control. He also managed to reduce the role of the military in the war economy. The military had interfered in the development and manufacturing



# Working Under Pressure

**H**ITLER ACHIEVED, what 1980s British PM Margaret Thatcher could only have dreamt of – the total subjugation of the workforce. The highly policed Nazi state discouraged industrial action as a negotiating tool and had replaced workers' representational rights, via the unions, with politicised go-betweens who sided with the management. The worker was highly regimented and his employment depended upon an ID card which could be revoked for disciplinary offences.

The workers' support had largely been bought by the raft of benefits known collectively as '*Kraft durch Freude*'. But as the war drew on, benefits were replaced by empty words as working conditions became ever harder. The drive, especially from 1942, with the ascendancy of Albert Speer, for ever greater efforts by the factories was to some degree counter-productive. The great strain imposed on the workforce led to a staggering rise in illness among employees and an explosion of accidents at work. In some key industries, there was a fall rather than a rise in productivity. Absenteeism and indiscipline were also a problem. Later on in the war the unending air raids compounded unrest amongst workers.

The Ford Plant in Cologne in the Ruhr, which experienced some of the heaviest Allied bombing, suffered absentee rates of 25 percent throughout 1944. Even in Munich, which was relatively unscathed, the BMW works had rates of up to 20 percent in the summer of 1944. The government recognized the problem and pressured the factory management to enforce discipline. On 4 May 1944, the plant leader at the Daimler-Benz Untertürkheim factory outlined some of the penalties that could be imposed: "All available measures must be taken to combat absenteeism... in

cases of unexcused absence from work and irresponsible reduction in work performance, the plant leader is not only entitled but is even duty bound to withdraw the offenders' bonus food ration cards, since in such cases the preconditions which are necessary for the provision of bonus food ration cards are no longer fulfilled."

If these measures did not work, there was always the Gestapo who occasionally made an example of an employee. There was the occasional case of an obstructive worker being sent to a concentration camp. But these instances bucked the trend.

Most people worked untiringly for Hitler. The workers of the Third Reich proved to be one of the most unrevolutionary proletariats of all Europe.



*Top left: Initially, women (especially middle-class women) proved reluctant to join the labour force. But as the war dragged on and the situation became more desperate, they proved themselves to be committed and productive workers.*

*Top right: The massive crater receives little attention from passers by. Such sights had become common place, to complain could lead to a visit from the Gestapo, perhaps even arbitrary arrest and imprisonment.*

*Above: Life continued as best as it could in Germany's ruined cities. The bombs killed and wounded Nazis and anti-Nazis alike, and created a grim solidarity and determination amid a shared misfortune.*

*Left: By mid July 1944, city dwellers were living a troglodyte existence in rat-infested cellars and temporary shelters. They exchanged one dungeon for another when the sirens lured them.*





**Above:** One of Speer's greatest achievements was his taming of the military. Their inefficient procurement system had failed to coordinate or prioritise weapons supply and development. Resources were thus wasted through excessive diversification.



**Left:** Speer commented that the success of the bombing raids over Germany was the greatest Allied victory of the war. The rebuilding of factories and the dispersal of production to safer locations severely disrupted industry.

**Below:** As Minister of Armaments, Speer delivered miraculous increases in production. But his achievements served only to stave off defeat, rather than provide Hitler with the means to victory.



of weapons and largely slowed down the production of goods. Hitler noted that this interference meant that his industrialists were always complaining about this niggardly procedure – today an order for 10 howitzers, tomorrow for two mortars and so on.”

Military interference meant that German industry lost a sense of priority due to conflicting and complicated demands. As a group of German engineers from Rechlin complained in 1944, “nobody would seriously believe that so much inadequacy, bungling, confusion, misplaced power, failure to recognize the truth and deviation from the reasonable to really exist.” Speer successfully pushed the military out of the war economy and allowed production to be run by industrial engineers. This paid considerable dividends in production, which rose markedly in 1943-44.

## BOMBED TO OBLIVION

Only the success of the Allied bombing campaign in the summer of 1944 slowed down and finally destroyed German production. Hits on factories slowed the output of goods.

The American daylight bombing and British night-time raids also had an effect on the city around the industrial area or factory that was nominally the target. Water, gas and electricity supplies were disrupted or cut, as were railway lines and roads. Many smaller component-producing factories were also hit. Much of that damage could be rapidly repaired and production might restart within months, weeks or even days. However, on top of all this, bombing produced indirect problems such as sapping the morale of the workforce.

Bombing also disrupted mass production. Speer's deputy, von Heydekampf, who was responsible for tank production, explained that the bombing forced him to modify production by “the breaking down and dispersal of plants, starting up factories on account of their geographical position instead of their technical capacity.” It is of interest to note, however, that the Allies often had poor intelligence about the effects of raids on German industry. At the beginning of April 1944, for example, air attacks on German ball-bearing factories stopped - Allied air staffs had assumed that they had totally destroyed German ball-bearing capability. As Speer commented: “Thus, the Allies threw away success when it was already in their hands.”

German production facilities were forced into smaller and camouflaged premises. Much German work moved underground, which made expansion of production considerably more difficult.

In January 1945, Speer estimated that bombing had reduced tank production by 35 percent, aircraft production by 31 percent and lorry production by 42 percent. Though at the last, German industry made fantastic efforts and sacrifices to fill quotas demanded, Speer's final conclusion was that the victory of the bombers was “the greatest lost battle of the war.”



# Hitler's Nero Order

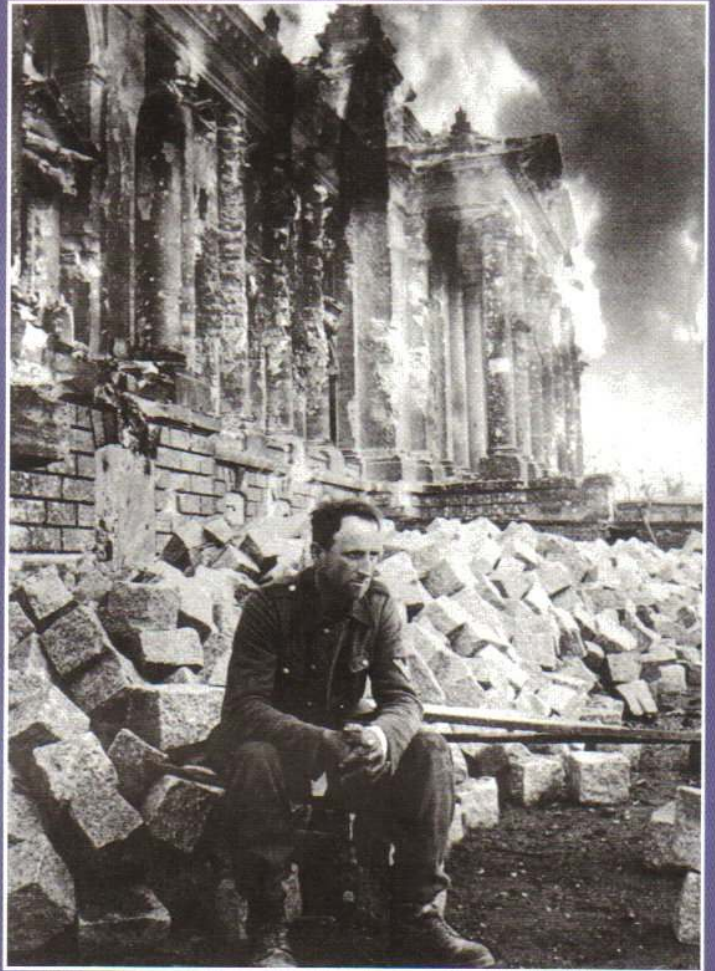
**E**VEN AS THE ALLIED ARMIES closed on the Reich, Hitler laid plans to turn Germany into a wasteland. He wanted only scorched earth to be left to the 'liberators'. All the factories, food and medical supplies, all the dikes and dams, all bridges, all transportation facilities, were to be blown up. All infrastructure was to be eliminated, so that it would be virtually impossible to operate in these areas.

Hitler orders would have meant the end of Germany and the German people. As early as September 1944, plans were prepared for the destruction. But these were strongly resisted by some within the Party. Albert Speer was their spokesman. He stated "we must remain ready for battle to the end. Factories can be made inoperable, but they must not be destroyed."

For nearly six months Speer devised ways of circumventing Hitler's 'Nero' orders. When in mid-March 1945 the confrontation finally occurred between the two former friends, Hitler bitterly informed his Minister: "If the war is to be lost, the nation also will perish."

Had this order been carried out, millions would have been condemned to death through poverty and starvation. Men such as Speer, who recognised that Hitler's cause was hopeless, refused to let Germany suffer the same fate as Nazism. Speer also had the extraordinary expectation, for a man so implicated in the Reich's slave trade, that he would be asked by the Allies to assist in Germany's restructuring after the war. The Nero order was never carried out and, though it took time, German industry did recover – without Speer's help.

*Below and Bottom: As Berlin collapsed around him, Hitler retreated into the bunker, descending further into his own paranoid world. Unable to deal with inevitable destruction of his beloved Reich, Hitler became increasingly enraged at the reports of defeat. He stood at his strategy map making fantastical plans for an eleventh hour reprieve and reminisced about happier times. He blamed defeat on the German people who had failed him – their fate, he believed, was irrevocably tied to that of the Reich and if it would not survive then neither would they.*



*Above: Hitler was unable to forgive the failure of the German people: "If the war is lost, the people are lost also... For the nation has proved itself to be the weaker and the future belongs to the stronger eastern nations. In any case, only those who are inferior will remain after the struggle, for the good have already been killed."*

*Below: By 1945, Hitler and Speer's once close relationship was compromised as Speer repeatedly impressed upon the Führer the nature of Germany's desperate plight. He wrote to Hitler saying: "No one has the right to take the viewpoint that the fate of the German people is tied to his personal fate."*







# END IN ITALY

The 'soft-underbelly' of Europe remained an intractable problem for Eisenhower. Kesselring denied the Allies final victory in the peninsular until it made no difference.





*Facing page: Scenes of liberation such as this were repeated up and down Italy as the Allies crawled their way northwards. They were opposed by a tireless and professional defence.*

*Below: As in other theatres, German operations in Italy were severely hampered by partisan activity. The terrain, which so suited the Germans in defence also favoured guerilla tactics.*



*Top: The Ponte Vecchio bridged the River Arno at the strategically vital town of Florence. Built in 1375 and extended in 1564, it was a monument to Renaissance architecture. In sparing it, a priceless piece of Italian history was preserved.*

*Above: Field Marshal Alexander was promoted Allied Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean on 27 November 1944. Although not an original thinker, he had courage and great charm.*

**T**HE GOTHIC LINE was the Germans last major defensive barrier. Kesselring utilised the natural obstacles afforded by the Apennines and the rivers Foglia and Pesaro and added strong in-depth man-made defences.

The Allies had suffered badly in a year of hard campaigning that had pitted them against the twin evils of the Italian weather and the tactical brilliance of the German defenders. Despite this, Churchill optimistically predicted that German resistance in Italy was on the verge of collapse. But the British PM underestimated the determination of his opponents, who continued to hold the line until the end of April 1945.

Rome had fallen on 4 June 1944, fast on the heels of the Allied breach of the Gustav line. German forces in Italy were forced to fall back on the intermediate Albert Line that ran from Grosseto on the west, past Lake Trasimene to the river Chienti and to the Adriatic east coast. But as early as 1 June 1944 Field Marshal Albert Kesselring commanding Army Group C, the German forces in Italy, had decided to make a stand on the line of the northern Apennines. But he needed time to prepare his positions. The Allies must be stalled till the

autumn, he told his commanders.

Italy lent itself to defensive fighting and the Germans fought a series of masterful withdrawals. The country was a narrow peninsular with steep mountains, narrow winding roads, deep river valleys and grim winter weather that produced ribald jokes about "Sunny Italy".

## BURNING BRIDGES

Besides the Albert Line the Germans had established blocking positions on the main roads from Rome to Sienna and Perugia to Arezzo. North of these positions they established the Arno Line along the valley of the River Arno. In Florence, German engineers blew up every bridge across the river with one important exception. To their credit, orders to destroy the historic Ponte Vecchio were refused, instead they cratered its approaches and filled the rubble with anti-personnel mines.

The Germans, masters of delaying tactics through the use of demolitions, booby traps and minefields, had to contend with the ever-present threat of Allied air attacks. While medium bombers struck road and rail communications, fighters attacked convoys and vehicles. Night time brought an additional threat from partisans.

Based in the Apennines, they attacked soft targets such as isolated vehicles and small groups of troops. Local resistance also gave invaluable help recovering Allied aircrew whose aircraft had been shot down behind enemy lines.

## OPERATION OLIVE

General Alexander, with the benefit of up-to-the-minute ULTRA deceptions was

convinced that the Gothic Line would be broken with ease. At dawn on 25 August 1944 British, Canadian and Polish troops launched the first probing attacks on the Gothic Line. However it was not until 12 September that the battle begun in earnest. The first move was Operation Olive – an attack on the right flank along the Adriatic Coast by three corps. By 29 August they had reached





**Above:** Lt-General Lucian K Truscott took over command of the US 5th Army on 15 December 1944. A battle-proven commander, he had seen action in Operation Torch, the break-out from Anzio and Operation Dragoon.



**Top:** Two Churchill ARKs are used to form a bridge for the 8th Indian Division over the river Senio, April 1945. Several rivers lay in the way of the Allied advance. They were each an engineering challenge, made even more difficult by the annual Spring floods.

**Above:** On 21 September 1944, Rimini fell to the Greeks. The town was taken only after a bitter house-to-house battle. Infantry are photographed clearing final German pockets of resistance.

the Foglia and the Gothic Line. Although the Canadians managed to break through the defences and reach the River Conca a day later, the British were held in front of Clemente. Kesselring moved his forces to block these moves and they and heavy autumn rain brought the attack to a halt.

On 12 September, the US II and British XIII Corps were

launched against the centre of the Gothic Line high on the Apennines. They were attacking at the junction between the German 10th and 14th Armies just east of the Gigo di Scarperia pass. On the west coast, the US IV Corps kept the pressure on the Germans and prevented reinforcements moving to the mountains. In the Apennines the Americans

became involved in a desperate fight for the two peaks Montecelli and Monte Altuzzo that dominated Il Gigo Pass. But these did not fall until 17 September.

## SNAIL'S PACE

On the coast, the British 8th Army resumed its attacks on Cariano on the night of the 12 September. They looked close to a major breakthrough. However, the elements once again contrived against them as heavy autumn rains prevented tanks from being brought forward. The advance was not resumed until a day later. A week's hard fighting followed and the Germans were finally forced back to the Rimini Line.

Up in the mountains, American troops captured Fiorenzuola on 21 September which presented Kesselring with the threat that they might break through to Route 9. On the 8th Army front, the Greek Brigade took Rimini and the Canadians crossed the Marecchia River. The next obstacle was the River Po about 100km to the north, but in between were no less than nine rivers to be assaulted before the 8th Army reached this obstacle.

On 24 September the forces of General Mark Clark

advanced towards Bologna. The German Army had fought hard but by 27 September it appeared that the Allies were through the Gothic Line.

By 7 October, 8th Army began to attack towards the River Rubicon and in five days they were across this symbolic barrier. At the end of October, the campaigning season in the central sector was over. In one month the 5th Army had suffered 15,700 casualties, but it was still trapped in the mountains.

On 24 November General Mark Clark relinquished his command of the US 5th Army. He was succeeded by General Lucien "Old Gravel Guts" Truscott. Clark, in turn, took over from General Harold Alexander as C-in-C of the 15th Army Group and so command of Allied ground forces in Italy. Alexander was promoted to Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean.

## RAVENNA TAKEN

On the coast the advance continued. Canadian troops occupied Ravenna on 5 December. Fighting slowed down but by 29 December, the 8th Army had reached the line of the River Senio south of Lake Comacchio.





## PEACEFUL OVERTURES

ON 3 MARCH 1945, an OSS agent met SS General Eugen Dollmann at Lugano, Switzerland. It was the first of a series of secret contacts that had been initiated by General Karl Wolff, the 39-year-old military governor and SS chief in northern Italy. Wolff had acted as the liaison officer between Hitler and Mussolini. He recognised that although Germany's cause was beyond hope, he could perhaps save his own skin. On 8 March Allen Dulles the head of intelligence at the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) – later the CIA – met Wolff and started the process, code named 'Sunrise' that would lead to the surrender of German forces in Italy. On 19 March Dulles, accompanied by two senior officers from Alexander's HQ, the American General Lyman Lemnitzer, a future head of NATO, and the British General Terence Airey, met Wolff at Ascona on Lake Maggiore in Italy. The Allies were in no mood to parley, they wanted unconditional surrender. Wolff retired to consult with General Heinrich von Vietinghoff, Kesselring's deputy.

On 25 March 1945, von Vietinghoff succeeded Kesselring as C-in-C Italy. *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler ordered Wolff not to leave Italy. The head of the SS had picked up rumours of the meetings and since Himmler was himself involved in tentative negotiations with the Allies, he did not want Wolff to upstage him.

On 23 April, Wolff again approached the Allies. Von Vietinghoff had agreed that an armistice could be signed without reference to Berlin. It was not until the 27 April that Dulles was given authority from Alexander's HQ to resume negotiations. The Germans signed a formal surrender document on 29 April, to come into effect on 2 May 1945.

*Right: Unusually Allen Dulles made little secret of the fact that he was a spy. Consequently, he was besieged by a multitude of informants, many of which proved to be invaluable.*



*Far right: On 4 May the US 5th Army and 7th Army met at the Brenner Pass. Caught in the middle, the defeated German army begins to make its way to the POW enclosures having surrendered on 2 May 1945.*

*Below: M10 tank destroyers of the South African Division fire on German positions flanking the Fifth Army front on Highway 64 near Bologna.*



*Top: Wolff (second left) keeping dangerous company. He survived the war and appeared as a witness at Nuremberg in full SS uniform. West German courts later sentenced him to two periods in prison and he was released in 1971, dying in Rosenheim on 15 July 1984.*

*Below right: German Army Commander General von Vietinghoff is photographed at the hotel where he was held captive after surrendering.*

*Below: Feldmarschall Albert Kesselring conducted a stubborn defence of Italy which tied down the US 5th and British 8th Armies to the last days of the war.*







*Above and above right: Corporal Tom Hunter (left) aged 21, and Major Lassen (right) aged 24, were both posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. Hunter's charge over 200 yards under intense fire so demoralized the enemy that six of the gunners surrendered immediately afterwards.*

*Left: British soldiers provide cover for troops clearing the town of Cariano after the weather allowed the attack to resume.*

*Bottom left: German paratroops contemplate their future. As the winter of 1944-45 drew on they were aware that they were running out of time as well as replacements and supplies of all types.*



Kesselring had considered that the valleys of the Rivers Po and the Adige could be used as intermediate defence lines as his forces fell back to strong positions in the southern Alps. Both he and Alexander were aware of just how difficult it would be to dislodge German forces in the mountains. The

British General knew that it was critical therefore to keep the pressure on the Germans.

At this point Hitler issued one of his disastrous stand-fast orders. He refused Kesselring permission to withdraw into more defensible positions and insisted that Army Group C should stand and fight.

An uneasy stalemate now set in. With heavy frosts and snow, the struggle on both sides was against the elements and not each other. Allied supply routes were only kept open by the daily and unremitting efforts of thousands of civilians and all but those units in the most forward positions. Whilst the Germans were forced to hoard their meagre stocks of petrol and ammunition, the Allies finally began to receive some of the specialised equipment they had for so long been denied. Throughout the remaining winter months training began in earnest in preparation for the Allied Spring offensive. All the Germans could do was to build up their defences as best they could and wait for the strike.

## FINAL OFFENSIVE

The Allied offensive was launched on 9 April. In preparation for this, on the night of 1 April, British Commandos had attacked the spit running between Lake Comacchio and the Adriatic. On the 4 and 5 April the islands on the lake were seized. It was during this fighting that the Dane, Major Anders "Andy"

Lassen, of the SBS and Cpl Tom Hunter of No 43 Commando were killed winning the Victoria Cross. Hunter had used the section Bren gun to neutralise German machine gun positions and Lassen, though mortally wounded, had continued to throw hand grenades to cover the withdrawal of his patrol.

The fighting around the Lake area was intended to tie down the German flank to give the major assault a greater chance of success. General Mark Clark not only had a depleted force, but one of the most heterogeneous field armies of the war, with contingents from over 25 countries. The previous year, the French Expeditionary Corps and the US VI Corps, some 86,000 men, had been deployed in Operation Anvil/Dragoon – the landings in southern France on 15 August 1944. Their place was taken by 2,500 men of the Brazilian Corps under General Joao Mascarenhas de Moraes and the US 92nd Division composed of black soldiers. Clark had the added problem that more than one third of his



# The Italian Theatre



artillery had been detached to support the Dragoon landings.

The first phase of the attack was by the 8th Army where Indians and New Zealanders of V Corps attacked across the Senio towards Lugo. By 11 April, a bridgehead had been established over the Santerno and a day earlier an amphibious operation at Menate across Lake Comacchio had turned the German position in front of the Argenta Gap.

## FALL OF MUSSOLINI

On 14 April Truscott's 5th Army launched its attack, two days behind schedule because of bad weather. A day later the Polish II Corps under General Anders began to cross the River Sillario and sat astride the

excellent Route 9 drove northwest towards Bologna.

The Salo Republic, the puppet Italian Fascist State headed by Benito Mussolini, had hung on in northern Italy with its headquarters at Lake Garda. On 18 April Mussolini left his villa on the lake for Milan, where he planned to join his German Allies in a last ditch stand in the Alps. He failed to raise any support and a week later left for Lake Como.

Despite tough fighting in mountainous terrain, 5th Army broke through to the suburbs of Bologna on 20 April. General Vietinghoff, staring defeat in the face, ordered his troops to retreat across the Po. He succeeded by 23 April, but left most of his heavy equipment

behind. On 25 April the US 5th Army, faced with little opposition, took Parma and Verona and a day later the Allies reached the River Adige. On the west coast the US advance had been slower and it was not until 27 April that Genoa was liberated.

## SURRENDER TERMS

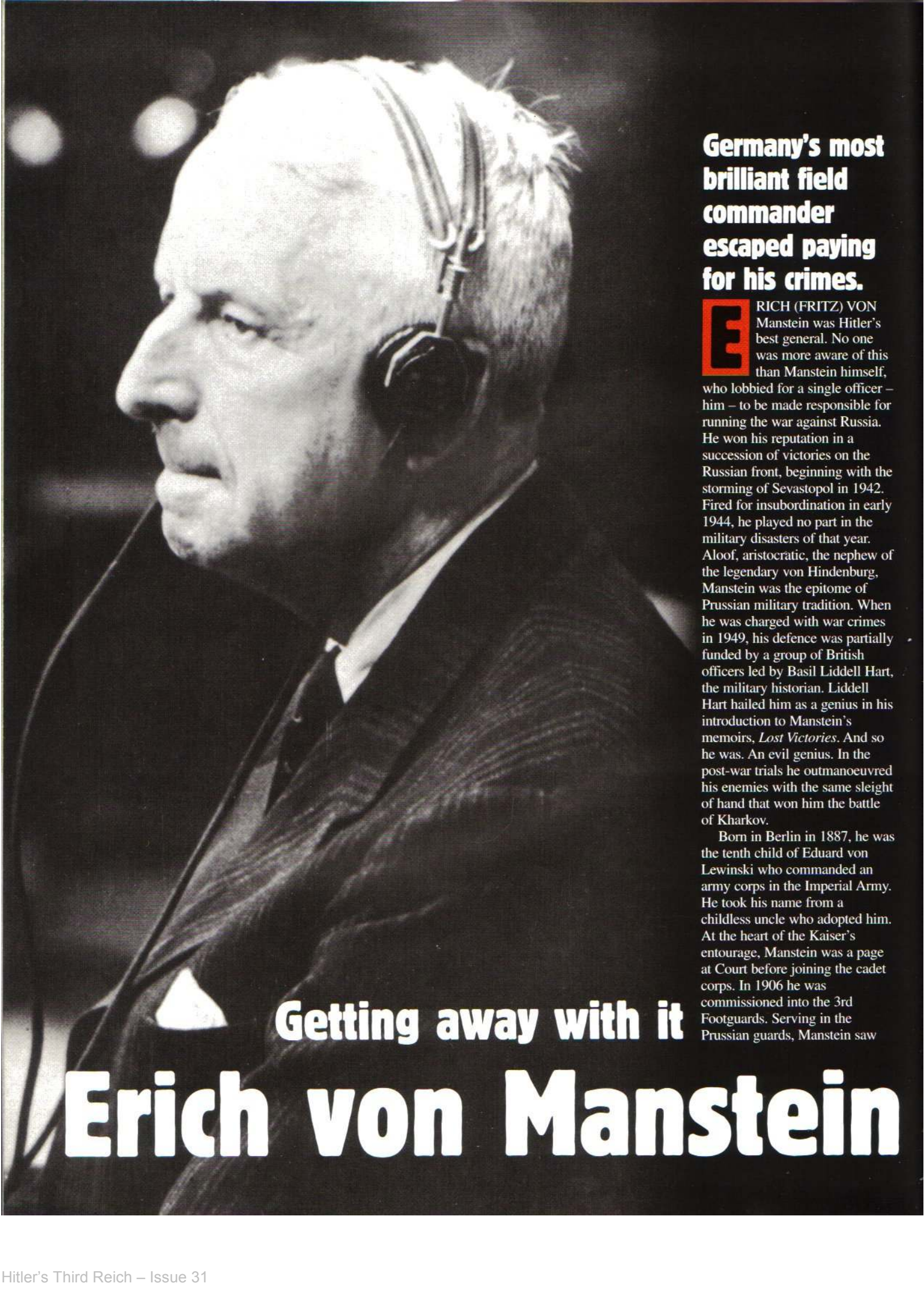
Now without his German allies to protect him, Mussolini was a hunted man. He attempted to escape into Switzerland, hidden in a convoy of German troops. The convoy was intercepted on 27 April by Italian partisans on the shore of Lake Como. The Germans were allowed to continue but the Italians were pulled off the trucks. Mussolini, huddled in a German soldier's

overcoat, was recognised and held overnight in a farmhouse. He was executed on 28 April 1945 by the Communist partisan leader Walter Audisio. Clara Petacci, his lover, died with him trying to protect Mussolini from a hail of submachine-gun fire. Their mutilated bodies were hung from a garage forecourt in a public square in Milan.

On 29 April the Germans signed an unconditional surrender at Caserta. It came into effect at 13.00 GMT on 2 May, just six days before Victory in Europe Day.

In over 20 months of some of the most savage fighting of the war, the Germans had proved the lie to Churchill's famous maxim that Italy was the 'soft underbelly' of Europe.





**Germany's most brilliant field commander escaped paying for his crimes.**

**E**RICH (FRITZ) VON Manstein was Hitler's best general. No one was more aware of this than Manstein himself, who lobbied for a single officer – him – to be made responsible for running the war against Russia. He won his reputation in a succession of victories on the Russian front, beginning with the storming of Sevastopol in 1942. Fired for insubordination in early 1944, he played no part in the military disasters of that year. Aloof, aristocratic, the nephew of the legendary von Hindenburg, Manstein was the epitome of Prussian military tradition. When he was charged with war crimes in 1949, his defence was partially funded by a group of British officers led by Basil Liddell Hart, the military historian. Liddell Hart hailed him as a genius in his introduction to Manstein's memoirs, *Lost Victories*. And so he was. An evil genius. In the post-war trials he outmanoeuvred his enemies with the same sleight of hand that won him the battle of Kharkov.

Born in Berlin in 1887, he was the tenth child of Eduard von Lewinski who commanded an army corps in the Imperial Army. He took his name from a childless uncle who adopted him. At the heart of the Kaiser's entourage, Manstein was a page at Court before joining the cadet corps. In 1906 he was commissioned into the 3rd Footguards. Serving in the Prussian guards, Manstein saw

**Getting away with it**

# **Erich von Manstein**





action in Belgium before being transferred to the Russian front in 1914, where he was wounded in November. He served on General von Gallwitz's staff during the battle of Verdun in 1916 and spent most of the next two years on the western front. Clever, hard working and socially connected, it was no surprise that he was retained by the post-1918 *Truppenamt* – the General Staff in disguise.

## TACTICAL GENIUS

saHitler did not recognize Manstein's character at first. The Führer regarded him as another patrician obstacle in the way of National Socialism. When Hitler had Brauchitsch remove a number of generals in the wake of the Blomberg-Fritsch affair, Manstein was removed from Beck's staff in Berlin and sent to an infantry division in Silesia. Nevertheless, using his contacts he secured the post of Rundstedt's Chief-of-Staff in Army Group (AG) A during the invasion of Poland.

Instrumental in developing the brilliant plan to attack France through the Ardennes, Manstein only managed to secure a command, with von Kluge's 4th Army, after the Dunkirk evacuation. In the succeeding weeks, he proved himself to be an outstanding field commander.

In February 1941 he took command of the 61st Panzer Corps which formed part of Hoepner's *Panzergruppe* in AG North during the invasion of Russia. He led his corps with all the panache of a born tank general, racing over 100 miles in the first few days and not worrying when he was temporarily surrounded by a Russian counter-attack around Lake Ilmen.

In September, Manstein took command of the 11th Army, then poised to break into the Crimea. Sevastopol was the key objective: the base of the Russian Black Sea fleet. The Russians launched a counter-attack across the Kerch straights, but Manstein destroyed it and prepared to storm fortress

Sevastopol and its ring of concrete and steel fortifications. Promoted *Generaloberst* at the beginning of 1942, his success in reducing the great fortress in July won him a Field Marshal's baton.

Hitler ordered Manstein to undertake a new siege in the autumn: Leningrad. Manstein was appalled! Barely had he arrived, and while his siege train was still en route, Manstein found himself under attack by the first of a series of Russian counterattacks from late 1942. At grievous cost to both sides, Manstein defeated the Russian attacks and destroyed General Vlasov's elite 2nd Shock Army. An even greater Russian attack on the 9th Army, led by Zhukov in person, was smashed so comprehensively that it was excised from the Soviet official history after the war. But the third counter-offensive of the year, this time launched either side of Stalingrad, broke clean through to isolate the German 6th Army.

## NO RESCUE FOR PAULUS

Manstein was flown south to take command of AG Don. He signalled Paulus on 26 November, promising to do all that he could to rescue the 6th Army. What Paulus never knew until after the war, was that Manstein had already signalled OKH, agreeing with the assessment of AG B, that 6th Army had to fight its way west without delay. In his memoirs, Manstein berates Paulus for not defying Hitler and ordering his army to break out. Yet Manstein was Paulus' superior officer and had known right from the start that the 6th Army was desperately short of fuel at the start of the encirclement. It took Manstein more than a fortnight to assemble the meagre rescue force, by which time the 6th Army was immobilized. Neither Manstein nor Paulus would take the responsibility for ordering a breakout when Hoth's panzer divisions hacked their way to within 50 km of the perimeter on 19 December. The two commanders spent the day exchanging messages by



*Above: Manstein epitomised the 'old school' aristocratic officer that Hitler detested. Surprisingly, the Führer tolerated criticism from Manstein in a way that staggered others who heard him.*

*Opposite: Manstein sits in the dock at Nuremberg. His defence of ignorance and denial worked. He served just three years of an 18 year sentence and was then immediately employed as military advisor to the newly created Bundesheer and enjoyed 20 years quiet retirement.*

teleprinter, Manstein hinting at the necessity for a breakout, but leaving his subordinate to issue orders in defiance of Hitler. Some veterans of the campaign believed Manstein encouraged Paulus to stay put at first, believing he could turn the tables on the Russians and score another victory. When this failed to materialize, Manstein hid behind the *Führerbefehl*, cover that served him well for 30 years.

In the wake of Stalingrad,

Russian armies surged west, liberating Kharkov in March. Manstein's AG South, an amalgam of AG Don and AG B, kept open a corridor for the retreating 1st Panzer Army, then ignored Hitler's demand for a static 'not one step back' defence. Instead, Manstein allowed the Russians to race headlong into a deadly trap he set southeast of Kharkov. His 'backhand blow' remains an object lesson in armoured





**Above:** In July 1943 Manstein watches the German offensive at Kursk unravel. His criticism of Hitler's command decisions reached a crisis the following year, and the outspoken Manstein was sacked.

**Above right:** At Nuremberg, Manstein's involvement in the eastern genocide was not known. But an excerpt from the 11th Army's war diary, that later came to light, records Manstein as saying that the German soldier was "the bearer of a racial concept" and the "avenger of all the atrocities which have been committed against him."

**Below:** In early 1943, a shaken, post-Stalingrad Hitler, allowed his field commanders more freedom of action than at any time since June 1940. Genius was given its head, and Manstein pulled off a brilliant riposte to retake Kharkov.



warfare, taught in military academies to this day. His tank reserves cut in behind the Soviets, severed the Russian tanks from their supply echelons and wiped them out. The reversal of fortunes was so drastic that Stalin explored the prospects of a compromise peace via Swedish intermediaries.

## ROAD TO KURSK

The weather halted a follow-up to Manstein's success. Hitler soon ordered a third, summer offensive in Russia, aimed at the salient around Kursk, but delayed the operation several times to enable the latest tanks to spearhead the assault. The attack did not begin until July, by which time Manstein thought the prospects for success had diminished. Nevertheless, the southern pincer movement, commanded by Manstein, smashed through successive lines of Russian entrenchments. His SS panzer corps was still making progress, despite fearful odds. He promised a breakthrough if the last panzer reserves were committed to him. But Hitler had had enough. He called off the battle on 13 July. Manstein's SS units were transferred to face a new Allied threat in Italy.

Manstein fought, and lost, the fourth and final battle for Kharkov during August. He conducted a fighting retreat back to Kiev that autumn. It cost the Russians dearly, but he failed to

persuade Hitler to evacuate the German bridgehead on the east bank of the Dnieper between Kanev and Cherkassy. This was duly encircled in January and overwhelmed in February after the 3rd panzer corps failed to break through to the rescue. In March, Zhukov cut off the 1st Panzer Army, which Hitler ordered to stand fast. Manstein argued for a retreat and this time got his way: the army broke out to the west, aided by a counter-attack by the II SS Panzer corps. However, Hitler could not forgive what he chose to regard as insubordination. He ordered von Manstein to report to the Obersalzberg where Hitler spent most of Spring 1944. Manstein was relieved of his command and sat out the rest of the war.

## FUGITIVE FROM JUSTICE

Ironically, his sacking by Hitler may have saved his life. It enabled him to convince many influential Allied officers that he was a straight military man who had done his patriotic duty despite his distaste for Germany's government. His apolitical stance was lauded by British officers who saw him as a fellow gentleman. But the court did not fully believe his stance and he was given a hefty prison sentence. Documents that only came to light after the trial revealed the extent of Manstein's complicity in the systematic slaughter of Jews and other Nazi victims.





## Sichelschnitt

**H**ITLER'S GENERALS PLANNED to invade France and the Low Countries in much the same way their fathers had in 1914. This was precisely what the French expected and they deployed their armies accordingly. Manstein – along with generals Blumentritt and Tresckow – presented a radical new plan, endorsed by von Rundstedt: a breakthrough via the Ardennes. Manstein's constant stream of memoranda to *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH) urging the adoption of his plans enraged the Army's Chief of Staff, Franz Halder. Manstein's actions were viewed as self-promotion and he was sidelined, being sent to take charge of an infantry corps in Stettin. But this gave Manstein the opportunity to explain his plan to Hitler in person. He met the Führer on 17 February. Hitler was entranced and thereafter did not rest until Brauchitsch and Halder too had accepted the Manstein plan, which he passed off as his own. The General Staff set to work to flesh out the Hitler-Manstein conception of an armoured attack in force through the Ardennes into the heart of the British-Franco field Army north of the Somme. Only a week after Hitler's conversion, they produced a proposal codenamed *Sichelschnitt* or Sickle Stroke. The plan was based on the expectation that in 1940, the French and their British allies, would push into Belgium to meet the German attack there. This would allow the Germans to outflank them through the Ardennes, drive for the coast and split the Allies in France in two.



Above: The map shows the first phase of the Battle for France. As Manstein predicted, the Allied forces in France moved up to engage AG B's push into Belgium. AG A's panzers quickly pushed to the coast and divided the opposition in France.



Above: Manstein (left) was one of those who ineffectually tried to prevent Hitler from expanding the war after the collapse of Poland. But when the escalation did come, Manstein made every effort to take a leading part.

Bottom left: Manstein was strongly resistant to the psychological intimidation by which Hitler overcame the intellectual independence of his lesser generals.

Below: Brauchitsch and Halder's (left) (Chief of the German General Staff) plan for the invasion of France was a direct copy of the failed Schlieffen Plan of 1914.







THE FIRST ACROSS THE RHINE

CONSTRUCTED BY  
• 291 ENGR C BN  
• 988 TDWY CO  
• 998 TDWY CO

THE LONGEST TACTICAL BRIDGE

# Across the Rhine and the Oder

Large rivers are major barriers to fast-moving mechanised armies. In 1945, the German heartland was protected by two; the Rhine and the Oder.



The US 1st Army was first across the Rhine on 7 March 1945. A catalogue of errors had resulted in the bridge at Remagen falling intact to the Americans.



**P**LANNING FOR the Rhine crossings had started well before the close of 1945. But it was not simply a matter of piling up men and supplies for the crossing; a great deal of preparatory training was necessary.

One of the largest efforts involved the conversion of several tank regiments to the use of LVTs (Landing Vehicles, Tracked), or 'Buffaloes' as they were known to the British. These were to be used to carry the first waves of men across. They were to be followed up by a second wave travelling in assault boats.

The crossings also involved a massive engineering element, especially in the huge operation to be mounted by Montgomery's 21st Army Group. The bridging equipment necessary to cross the Rhine had to be assembled, and the approach roads and other transport facilities had to be made ready. This was beyond the capabilities of British engineers and several US Army engineer regiments were seconded. Ultimately, engineer units used up over a quarter of all supplies and equipment involved in the Rhine crossings!

To add to the planners' problems, the Rhine had its own say in the matter. The area



*Top: Tank transporters move Buffaloes – the British name for American-built LVT amphibious assault vehicles – towards the Rhine. Designed for beach landing, the vehicles were ideal for river crossings.*

*Above: British forces entered Bremen in April 1945. Montgomery's 21st Army Group had been tasked with seizing Germany's main North Sea ports, simultaneously driving eastwards towards the Baltic.*

where the crossings were to be made is flat and prone to flooding. There had been a lot of rain and snow the previous winter. By March, the flood plains were still very wet. This might have been ideal terrain for the Buffaloes, but it was not so easy for the other vehicles. Nevertheless, it was a risk that had to be taken.

On the night of 23 March

1945 the crossings began, under a massive artillery barrage. The first wave went across in Buffaloes, assisted by amphibious DD (Duplex Drive) Shermans and other special vehicles. Air support was so intense that Wesel itself was confidently bombed by RAF Bomber Command when Allied troops were only a few hundred yards away. This not only





*Above: Although German resistance was weakening, Allied infantry still faced a bitter struggle. The Germans had the advantage of very short lines of supply. Their troops did not run short of essentials until the end.*

*Below: German resistance could be fierce. Sometimes, elite units like these Fallschirmjäger fought back hard. At other times, the resistance came from die-hard Nazi fanatics or brainwashed Hitler Youth members.*



cleared Wesel of the enemy but prevented the Germans from moving through the town to mount a counterattack.

The Allies did not have it all their own way, though opposition to the landings was patchy. In some areas the defenders fought fiercely, while

in others the preliminary bombardment had been so effective that organised defence was slight. However, the mud was so bad in places that not even the Buffaloes could make much forward progress, with the result that some of the second assault waves, crossing in boats,

came under intense fire and took heavy casualties.

But the sheer weight of the onslaught ensured that in most locations the Allies were soon able to wade ashore and establish sizeable bridgeheads. However, the main strength of the attack was yet to come – from the air.

This arrived at about midday when the first of the Allied airborne forces came into sight. What became known as the 'armada of the air' flew over the Rhine to disgorge two divisions of parachute troops. At times the sky seemed blackened by their numbers. They were followed by glider tugs, concentrated in two main zones; in the Diersfordter Wald and at Mehr-Hamminkeln.

## HIGH COST OF SUCCESS

Despite the pounding of the German defences by Allied air forces, some enemy flak positions survived. Their fire power accounted for one quarter of all glider pilot casualties in the operation.

Even so, most landed safely, ensuring that the airborne forces and the troops that had made the river crossings were able to join up, often well in advance of the anticipated times. By nightfall the Rhine bridgeheads were secure. Despite some local counter-attacks, the British were across the river to stay.

The major Allied effort was made in the British sector, where German opposition was at its strongest. This was due to the close proximity of Germany's vital Ruhr industries which led directly to the north German plains – the main route to Berlin.

## AMERICANS ACROSS

The American armies were allocated the more southern stretches of the Rhine. Although operations here were allocated fewer resources, they were just as successful.

The day before the launching of the main offensive, an assault regiment of the US 5th Division, had launched its own attack.

At short notice, Major-General Leroy Irwin, commander of the 5th Division, was ordered to throw his division across the Rhine south of Mainz, between Nierstein and Oppenheim. He sent the first wave of assault boats across the 1,000ft wide river just before midnight, under a brilliant moon. The attack was provided with strong artillery support, but the gun group later complained that it could find little in the way of worthwhile targets.

The first Americans to land captured seven German soldiers, who promptly volunteered to paddle their assault boat back for them. Although later waves ran into sporadic machine-gun fire, the regiment was across before midnight and moving towards the villages on the east bank, with support regiments flooding across behind them. By the evening of 23 March the entire 5th Division was across the river. A bridgehead had been formed and was awaiting the arrival of an armoured division readied on the west bank.

## MORE CROSSINGS

During the next few days, crossings were made at; Boppard, St Goar, Worms and Mainz. By the end of the month Darmstadt and Wiesbaden were in US hands. Armoured columns were driving for Frankfurt-am-Main and Aschaffenburg beyond. Further south, the French had put an Algerian division across, near Gernersheim. A huge Allied bridgehead was now formed from Bonn down to Mannheim, from which the last Western offensive would be launched. The plan was for a link up with the Russians on the Elbe, so splitting Germany in two.

## INTO GERMANY

The main objective for the US Twelfth Army Group would be the industrial region of Leipzig and Dresden. To the north, Montgomery's Twenty-first Army Group was to drive on Hamburg, its Canadian left flank



# Assault on a River

**T**HE WESTERN ALLIES were taking no chances with crossing the Rhine. Allied air forces were tasked with neutralizing the rump of the Luftwaffe (or what remained of it after the heavy losses sustained during the Ardennes offensive). Patrols were flown over Luftwaffe airfields likely to become involved in the crossings, mainly to prevent the Luftwaffe seeing the vast build-up of men and matériel close to the crossing points.

New railheads had to be established in the British sector to enable 662 tanks of all kinds, 4,000 tank transporters and 32,000 assorted vehicles to be brought up. Moreover, there were 3,500 field and medium guns to be assembled, together with a quantity of super-heavy artillery that would cover the main assaults.

*Right: Consolidation of the Allied bridgehead on the east bank of the Rhine was not troubled by the remnants of the Luftwaffe. Allied fighters hovered over any German airstrips which could have launched interceptors.*

*Below: Amphibious 'Duplex Drive' (DD) Sherman tanks had accompanied the Allies from the first assault at Normandy. They provided an extra punch for the first wave of attacking troops.*



*Below: Developed primarily for use by the US Marines in the Pacific, the Landing Vehicle Tracked gave Allied armies significant river-crossing ability, as well as providing mobility in flooded terrain.*

*Bottom: Two divisions of Allied airborne troops were dropped in advance of the main Allied thrust. German opposition, although stiff, was unable to repeat the success at Arnhem six months before.*







**Above:** By February 1945, German resistance to the Russians was largely an infantry affair, since fuel for vehicles was in short supply. The only answer many Wehrmacht units had to the hordes of Soviet tanks was the one-shot Panzerfaust anti-armour weapon.

**Below:** Waffen SS troops move past a knocked-out IS-2 'Josef Stalin' Tank. The best German troops were still capable of fierce resistance, but the Red Army simply had too many men, tanks and guns to be stopped.



clearing Holland of the enemy and then driving hard along the coast through Emden and Wilhelmshaven.

The US Ninth Army on the right was to curve around the Ruhr to meet Hodges' First Army at Lippstadt, encircling Field Marshal Walther Model's Army Group B in the Ruhr. After Hamburg, the British would drive up to the Baltic and Schleswig-Holstein, at the same

time pushing east to the Elbe down as far as Magdeburg.

## RUHR ENCIRCLED

The Ruhr, Germany's industrial heartland, was surrounded by the US 1st and 9th Armies on 4 April. The huge pocket contained the remnants of German Army Group B together with elements of Army Group A's Parachute Army. The pocket fell on 18 April, yielding 325,000 prisoners.

Model, the 'Führer's Fireman', committed suicide on 21 April.

On 13 April the Allies liberated Belsen and Buchenwald concentration camps and Vienna fell to the Red Army. Nuremberg, the spiritual home of the Nazis, fell to the US 7th Army on 20 April, while Dachau was liberated by the US Army on 25 April. To the north, elements of the German 11th Army were trapped in a pocket in the Harz Mountains, and fought hard before surrendering.

## RED RIVER CROSSINGS

In the East, the Red Army swung northwards to clear Pomerania and Silesia, resisted by the grandiloquently named Army Group Vistula under the inept command of the *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler. Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky's 3rd Guards Tank Corps spearheaded the push to the Baltic coast and reached it on 1 March. This thrust cut off the German garrisons and depots at Danzig (Gdansk) and Gotenhaven (Gdynia) and supported Zhukov's drive that reached the coast at Kolberg. This port held out until 18 March.

Four days later, the 1st Belarussian Front launched a flanking attack on Küstrin which fell on 30 March. To the south, in Silesia, Marshal Ivan Konev's forces drove on Grottkau and Moravska Ostrava. In Breslau, Silesia's main city, the population had been evacuated to Dresden and the city was declared a fortress. Defended by 35,000 troops, reinforced with paratroops through a makeshift airstrip, it held out until 8 May 1945.

## HELL FROM THE AIR

As the land offensive closed in on the Reich, the Allied air attacks continued with unabated fury. Nearly a quarter of a million tons of bombs had been dropped since the final offensives began, British and American heavy bombers were almost out of worthwhile targets. Dresden had no strategic value, but that did not stop RAF Bomber Command and the US

8th Air Force from destroying it. In a series of raids from 13–15 February, a firestorm was kindled which burned out the old city. The city's population, swollen by some 100,000 refugees, suffered horribly.

## ON TO BERLIN?

Debate now raged about who should take the prize of Berlin. Montgomery argued that his Army Group should race across the North German plain for the German capital.

Eisenhower was more cautious; he was casting a wary eye on the mythical 'Bavarian redoubt' to the south, where the Nazis were reputed to be preparing a (non-existent) last stand. In any case the supreme commander, solidly supported by Roosevelt, felt that it would be easier for the Russians to take the German capital. The ailing president thought that if he let the Red Army have the capital, Stalin would be more co-operative over the post-war division of Europe. The leaders of the Western democracies had still not learnt how to negotiate with dictators!

## THE END IN SIGHT

The real life *Götterdämmerung* of the Third Reich reached its violent conclusion as the Red Army closed in on Berlin. The final Soviet offensive began on 16 April, with a huge pincer movement. On the Baltic, the 2nd Belarussian Front pushed across the Oder at Stettin. To its left the 1st Belarussian Front had already crossed the river Oder and established a jumping off point at Küstrin. To the south the 1st Ukrainian Front hooked east and north across the rivers Oder and Neisse.

The Soviets three offensives employed 2.5 million troops, 6,250 armoured vehicles, 10,400 guns and mortars and 7,500 aircraft between them. This red tide, moving irresistibly westwards, swept away all opposition. The life expectancy of Hitler's Thousand Year Reich could now be counted in weeks.



# Red Juggernaut



**T**HE SOVIET ARMY poised on Germany's eastern borders at the beginning of 1945 was the most powerful military force ever assembled. The front was much shorter than it had been two years earlier, stretching 2,000km from Memel on the Baltic down to Yugoslavia. Massed along that line were over six million Soviet soldiers, deployed in nine 'Fronts' or Army Groups.

The Soviet strategy was simple: the southern Fronts would attack into Hungary, threatening Germany's last remaining oil supplies and drawing the Wehrmacht reserves away from Army Group Centre. The northern Fronts would reduce the German forces on the Baltic, pushing into East Prussia and driving westwards.

The main push would be in the centre, where the fronts commanded by Rokossovsky, Zhukov and Koniev would smash their way into the heart of Germany. The largest and most powerful group of forces was intended to destroy the Ostheer once and for all.

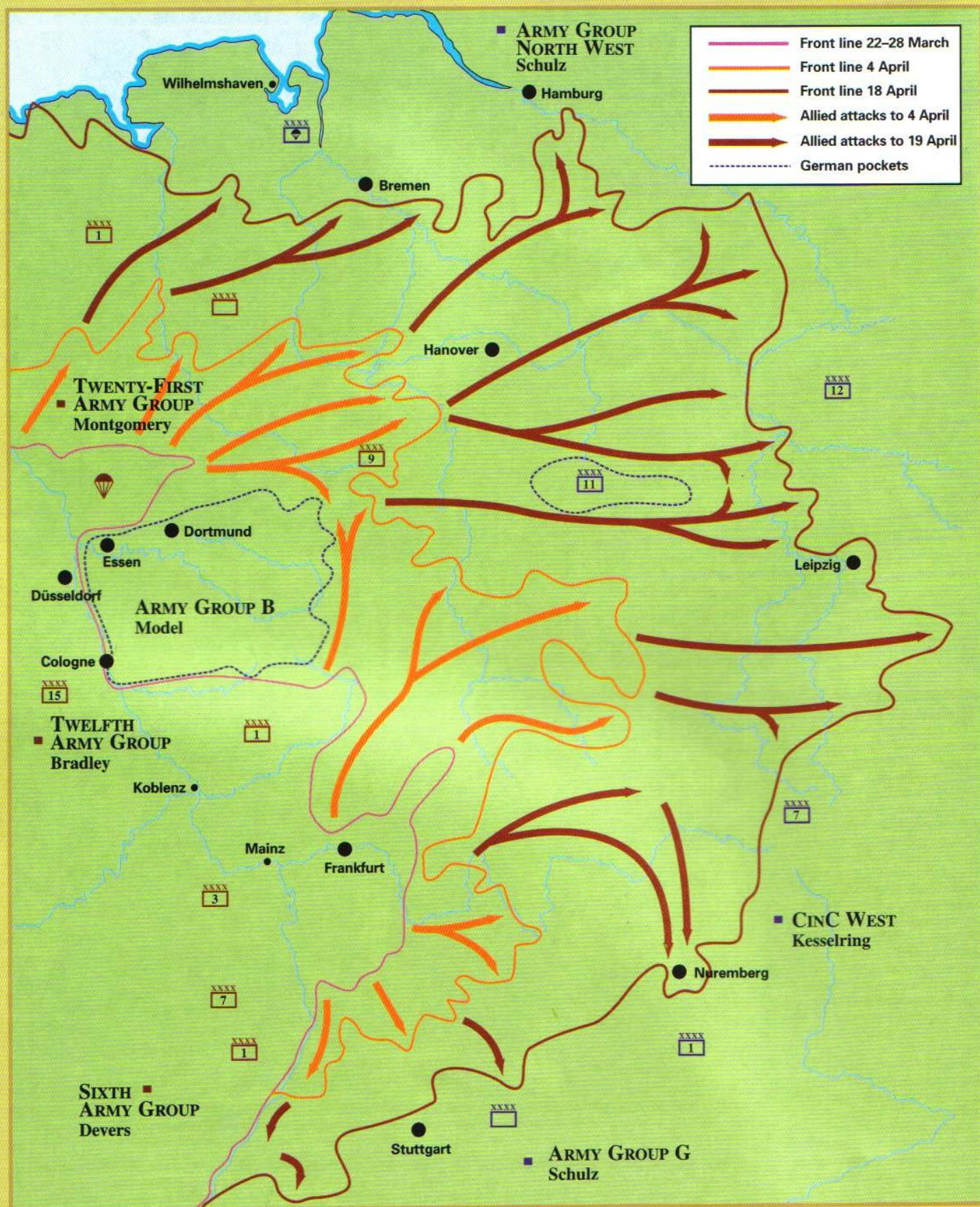


*Top: The Red Army of 1945 was a very different beast from the one which had suffered such catastrophic losses in 1941 and 1942. Veteran soldiers in huge numbers operated powerful weapons and equipment which had stood the test of battle. Spearheading that force was the IS2 heavy tank, with its powerful 122-mm gun.*

*Above: Stalin's army was led by determined, skillful commanders. These are the Marshals who directed the final attacks on Germany: (Front row, from left) I. Konev, A. Vasilievsky, G. Zhukov, K. Rokossovsky, K. Meretskov; (Back row, from left) F. Tolbukhin, R. Malinovsky, L. Govorov, A. Yermenko and I. Bagramyan.*

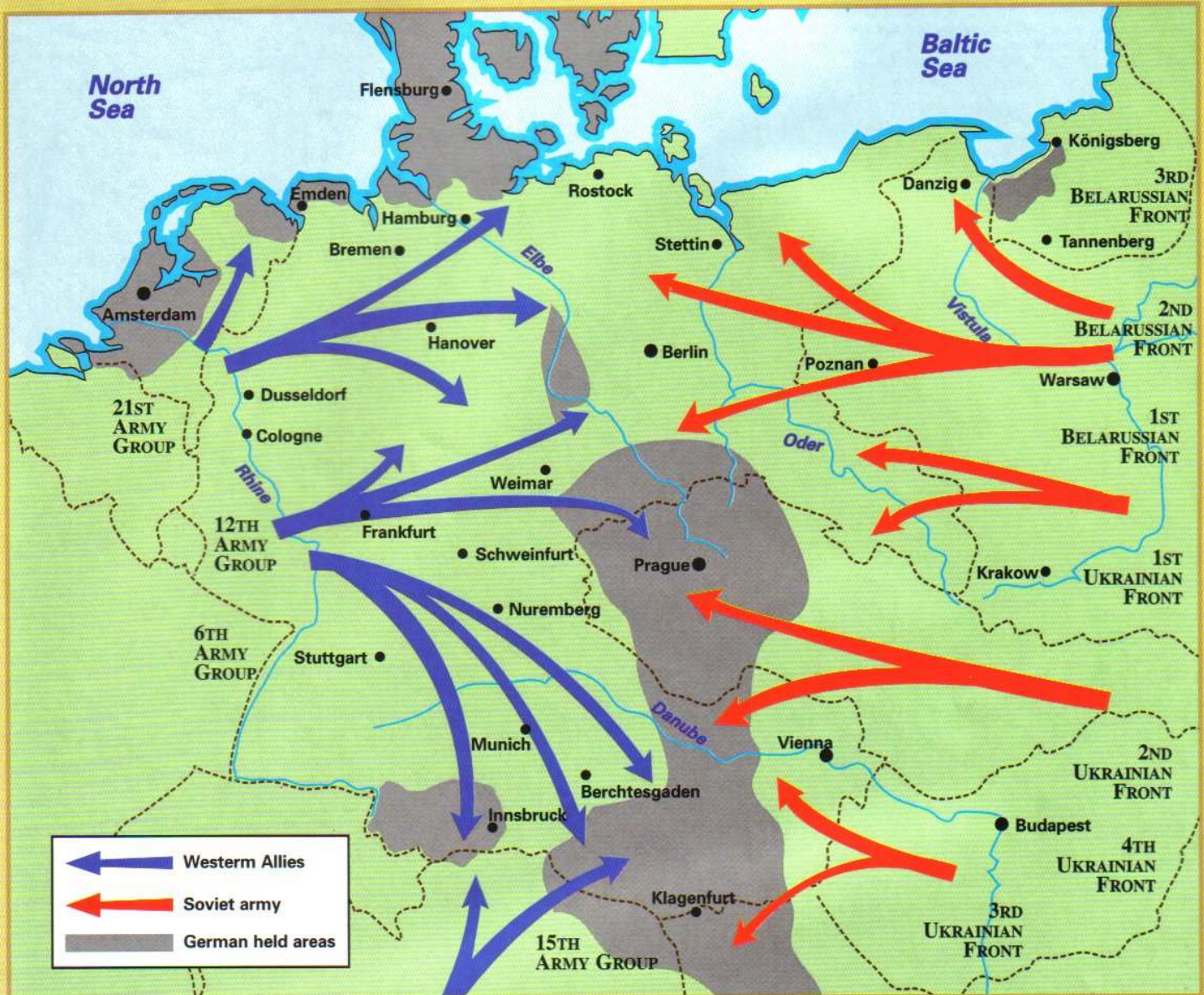


# Third Reich Dismembered





# HITLER'S BATTLES 31



**A**T THE BEGINNING of 1945, the German army was on the defensive. Its last attempts to regain the initiative having floundered. Allied armies stood poised on the borders of Germany itself, but had barely penetrated the home territory of the Reich. Senior commanders, notably Heinz Guderian, knew that this was the calm before the storm. Germany would be destroyed within a matter of months, dependant on just when the Allies chose to attack.

The first hammer blow came with the start of the main Russian offensive in January. Pouring through Poland and into East Prussia, the Red armies were hammering on the borders of the Reich within days. In the west, the British and the Americans were on the Rhine by the end of February, and in March their armies had struck out into Germany. Within a month, they had driven across the country, and on 25 April the American 1st Army had linked up with units of Konev's First Ukrainian Front at Torgau on the Elbe. With Montgomery's forces meeting Rokossovsky's further north, Berlin was cut off, and what remained of the Wehrmacht was squeezed into Bohemia, Bavaria and the Alps, with isolated commands in Norway, Denmark, Holland, and on the Baltic Coast. There was nowhere left to run.

*Right: At 4.40 in the afternoon of 25 April 1945, a patrol of the American 69th Infantry Division met the forward elements of the Red Army's 58th Guards Division at Torgau on the Elbe. Russians who had marched all the way from Stalingrad met Allies who had raced eastwards from Normandy. With that meeting Adolf Hitler's Third Reich was cut in half.*





*The schwere Panzerspähwagen SdKfz 231 was a pre-war design. Based on a truck chassis, the vehicle's overall weight ensured a poor cross-country performance. A modified design (designated SdKfz 232) sported a prominent frame aerial for use with a long-range radio set.*



# German Reconnaissance

**The German armed forces were the masters of battlefield reconnaissance during World War II. Their opponents could only copy their techniques.**

**A**ERICAN GENERAL, and Ben Hur author, Lew Wallace likened his 'skirmishers' to the antennae of an insect: probing ahead and to the flanks as the main body pushed forward. Some on horseback, some on foot, they identified enemy positions, enabling him to

manoeuvre the rest of his forces to maximum effect. By 1939 cavalry had been replaced by armoured vehicles in most armies, but the need for a reconnaissance force was more pressing than ever.

In some countries, famous cavalry regiments swapped horses for armoured cars and





carried on much as before. German panzer divisions included a reconnaissance unit that combined armoured cars and motorcycles. Although not formal descendants of historic German cavalry regiments, they embraced the cavalry tradition. On their uniforms, cavalry yellow replaced the pink piping of the regular tank crew. The AA (*Ausklärungs Abteilung* – reconnaissance detachment) later included light tanks and half-tracks, as the need to fight for information became greater. But the trick, as veterans testified, was to complete a mission without firing a shot. Their primary tool was the radio.

## 'HEAVY' SQUADRON

At the beginning of World War II an AA consisted of two squadrons of armoured cars, one 'heavy' squadron, one squadron of motorcycles, plus workshops, supply and transport elements. AA headquarters relayed information from the squadrons

to the panzer division HQ. The armoured car squadrons had five cars in the headquarters; one 'heavy' troop of 6 or 8-wheeled armoured cars; and two 'light' troops of six 4-wheeled armoured cars. The heavy squadron included two towed 75-mm light infantry guns, three 37-mm anti-tank guns and an assault pioneer troop. The motorcycle squadron had three troops, each of three sections – two with MG34 machine guns and one with a 50-mm mortar. They used sidecar combinations to move, but dismounted to fight.

It added up to a great deal of firepower for a very small unit. But it was not intended for the AA to storm enemy positions. Its firepower enabled it to fight through a defended area or to break contact with superior enemy forces. But once into the open, the AA would split up to cover a wide frontage. Individual sections of two armoured cars might be given an objective 20 or 40km away: how they got there

*Above: A squadron of leichter Panzerspähwagen SdKfz 221s put on a show of force in Prague on 23 March 1939. They heralded a Nazi occupation which was to endure until 8 March 1945.*

*Below: The schwerer Panzerspähwagen SdKfz 234/2 or 'Puma' was one of the finest armoured cars produced in World War II. It had a powerful 50-mm gun set in a turret of excellent ballistic shape.*



was up to them, the aim was for them to reach the target area and report what they saw or heard. It was not their business to get into fights along the way.

## FLIGHT NOT FIGHT

The standard 4-wheel armoured cars were the SdKfz 221 and 222. The latter had a larger turret to accommodate an automatic

20-mm cannon instead of a machine gun. Otherwise, they were very similar. Although fewer than 400 221s were completed when production ended in 1940, some were still in service at the end of the war, often with a 28-mm anti-tank gun instead of the MG 34. The 222 model was manufactured until 1943 but examples could be



# HITLER'S WAR MACHINE



**Above:** The Kübelwagen – the most familiar of all the Wehrmacht's vehicles – driven here by Ferry Porsche, son of Professor Porsche. Only 55,000 were produced, against 600,000 Jeeps built by the Allies.

**Below:** At its debut, the SdKfz 231 was the most advanced cross-country vehicle in the world. Possessing all-wheel drive and steering, it was, typically, over-engineered and too complex to manufacture quickly.



found in service up until the war's end. Armed and equipped, both types weighed about 4.8 tonnes and were capable of 80km/h on a road.

## SECRET TESTING

The SdKfz 231 *schwere Panzerspähwagen* – heavy armoured car – had its origins at the secret Kazan test centre in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Based on a truck chassis, it was capable of up to 65km/h on a road, but had only limited cross-country mobility, due to its poor weight to power ratio. Production was equally torpid, with only 123 examples built from 1932-37 – and built by three different manufacturers! They saw action during the invasion of Poland and the 1940 campaign before being relegated to a training role.

The need for better off-road performance was obvious. In 1934 the army issued a requirement for an 8-wheel heavy armoured car. With steering and drive for all eight wheels and a rear-mounted engine, the

*Versuchskraftfahrzeug 623* (experimental vehicle) entered service in 1937. By 1939 it was designated SdKfz 231 (sic). Deutsche Werke, Schichau, manufactured 607 examples between 1936 and 1943. Weighing 8 tonnes, they were armed with a turret mounted 20-mm cannon with 180 rounds plus a coaxial 7.92-mm machine gun with 2,100 rounds. During 1943, 109 were completed without a turret as the SdKfz 233. This had an open-top fighting compartment with a 75-mm L24 howitzer and 24 rounds instead. A troop of six was provided to each AA and they proved very popular in service.

## DESERT CAT

Büssing-NAG won the contract to develop an improved 8-wheel armoured car in August 1940. Significantly, it was to be designed to operate in tropical climates. Whether the army had North Africa or the Ukrainian steppe in mind is not clear, but the SdKfz 234 had a 12-cylinder air-cooled diesel and a turret-mounted 50-mm gun. Whereas previous armoured cars had an armoured body bolted to a chassis, the 234's armoured hull was the chassis. The campaign in North Africa was over by the time the first 234s were completed. In the event, only 100 or so of the 'Puma' as it was christened, were built as designed. In January 1944 it was ordered that only half the vehicles should have the 50-mm turret, the rest would have either the same turret as the SdKfz 222 (20-mm cannon) or carry a 75-mm howitzer like the 233. From June 1944, only a quarter of the 234s were completed with the 50-mm turret. Hitler intervened personally in November 1944, a typical instance of his insane micromanagement. He ordered the 75-mm PaK 40 anti-tank gun to be fitted in an open mounting instead: 89 SdKfz 234/4s were completed from December 1944 to March 1945.



# Desert Reconnaissance

## IN NORTH AFRICA

Reconnaissance units operated across formidable distances, placing a heavy burden on young officers and NCOs. The war in the desert retained some of the chivalry of days gone by, especially between the reconnaissance formations of the British and German armies.

Hans von Luck commanded the AA of 21st panzer division. He faced units of the British 11th Hussars and Royal Dragoons. Both sides were highly professional in their business, but unofficially agreed certain conventions in a landscape that was as dangerous as any enemy. Wounded were exchanged. If prisoners were taken the other side was informed to spare their families the terrible anxiety when men were posted 'missing'. Sometimes, prisoners were exchanged: von Luck's doctor blundered into a British camp one night, and was swapped for some synthetic quinine! Eventually, a ceasefire was agreed from 17.00 hours and messages exchanged over the radio. Von Luck wrote, "from a distance of about 15km we could often see the British get out their Primus stoves and make their tea. The agreement was kept up by both sides until we were forced by



events to give up the connection in Tunisia". One of the British COs, knowing the end was near, sent von Luck a letter via a Bedouin. He thanked the AA and its commander for their fair play and hoped they might all meet again 'in happier circumstances'.



**Top:** The Western desert is superb armoured-car terrain. The Germans overcame numerical inferiority by bold tactical moves, utilising surprise and speed.

**Above:** The German raiders and reconnaissance units were pitched against the Long Range Desert Group and the Special Air Service.

**Above left:** German reconnaissance units operated well in advance of Rommel's few Panzer units, locating and assessing likely targets and obstacles.

**Left:** Reconnaissance aircraft such as the versatile Fieseler Storch were of invaluable use in the featureless, open spaces of the desert.



# HITLER'S WAR MACHINE



*Above: The SdKfz 250 entered production within days of the invasion of Russia. More than 6,000 examples were completed by the end of 1943 and they came to dominate the reconnaissance detachments from 1942.*

*Below: The SdKfz 234/3 mounted a short L/24 75-mm tank gun at the front of an open superstructure. The vehicle was produced to provide a measure of fire-support for armoured car units from 1944 onwards.*



The profusion of sub-variants and the low production runs of German armoured cars were typical of Nazi combat vehicle manufacture. Reconnaissance vehicles suffered heavy attrition in their forward role, so the army made considerable use of captured enemy armoured cars. An 8 tonne 4 x 4 with a 20-mm cannon and a crew of four, the French Panhard P-178 was one of the best. The French army had over 300 in service in 1940 and the Germans used most of them during the invasion of Russia. Some were converted into railway protection vehicles: swapping their road wheels for rail wheels and used to patrol the lines against partisan attack. Others were fitted with 50-mm L/42 tank guns when the Panzer III was upgraded to the 50-mm L/60.

## **PRESSED INTO SERVICE**

Captured British Universal Carriers ('Bren-gun carriers')

were also employed; some examples captured in France were used in Russia. Others, taken in 1944, were fitted with three 88-mm bazookas and used as improvised anti-tank platforms in 1945. A small quantity of Humber and AEC armoured cars were captured by the Afrika Korps and used against their former owners. Perhaps the most numerous foreign armoured car in German service was the Russian BA-10. Some were fitted with German 37-mm anti-tank guns; some had the turret of the Russian T-26 light tank fitted, carrying a 45-mm gun. About 100 Italian Autoblinda 41 armoured cars were used by the German army; 37 captured in September 1943 when Italy changed sides and the rest completed at the Ansaldo works before 1945. Most were armed with 20-mm cannon, but some received 50-mm tank guns. They served in Italy and the Balkans. A handful of American M8s were taken in 1944 and used





by Otto Skorzeny's commandos during the Ardennes offensive.

The first autumn in Russia left all German wheeled vehicles floundering in the mud. The spring *rasputitza* was even worse. Fortunately the requirement for a semi-tracked reconnaissance vehicle had already been identified in 1939. The solution was the SdKfz 250. Only 1.66m high, the SdKfz 250 was easy to conceal. While the standard model was open-topped, with a machine gun mounted forward, there were an extraordinary number of variants including self-propelled mortars, howitzers, anti-aircraft guns and communications vehicles. The SdKfz 250/9 had an enclosed roof with the turret of the SdKfz 222 and replaced it in production after May 1943.

Hitler doubled the number of panzer divisions between the fall of France and the invasion of Russia, partly by halving the number of tanks in each formation. Few AAs reached full establishment before Barbarossa and attrition was so high that most panzer divisions disbanded their motorcycle battalion and added the survivors to their AA. From 1942 the arrival of the SdKfz 250 and all its variants led to a complete change in the structure of the AAs.

## AA EVOLUTION

By early 1944 a typical AA comprised a staff company, an armoured company, two reconnaissance companies and a heavy company. The staff company included four Pumas with 50-mm guns and three SdKfz 234s with 75-mm howitzers. The armoured company had 24 SdKfz 250/9s in eight troops of three, plus three SdKfz 250/3 radio vehicles. The reconnaissance companies were similar, but with SdKfz 250/1s. The heavy weapons company had a troop of 75 mm howitzers and one of 80 mm mortars as well as assault engineer vehicles.

There were many variations on the standard organization, a reflection of equipment shortages



– or, in the case of some of the premier SS panzer divisions – additional kit. The mission remained reconnaissance, but the AAs could be powerful formations in their own right. Allied forces landing at the Salerno bridgehead were attacked by a *Kampfgruppe* built around the reconnaissance battalion of the Hermann Göring panzer division. It consisted of 1st (armoured) company in SdKfz 250s; 3rd panzergrenadier company, with trucks in lieu of half-tracks; 4th panzergrenadier company, with VW *Schwimmwagen* plus HQ and signals elements. After the subsequent battles around Naples and Volturno, it received its missing half-tracks and gained another company in motorcycles as well as a company of armoured pioneers. Self-propelled anti-aircraft guns were often attached from the divisional flak battalion, since daylight movement drew down rocket-firing Hurricanes.

The reconnaissance units retained their importance as the Germans moved onto the defensive. It was vital to identify the distribution of an opponent's forces, so that the limited German resources could be distributed to meet the threat.

*Above: The Germans made extensive use of captured vehicles. By 1942 they had over 1500 different types in service. This captured American M8 armoured car is pictured late in 1944, France.*

*Below: SS troops assist a BMW R-75 motorcycle and side car combination in Russia in 1943. This model replaced the R-12 which had insufficient torque to deal with the often difficult Russian terrain.*







# CIVILIANS IN UNIFORM



**At the height of Hitler's rule, it seemed as though every German was in uniform.**

**T**HE ITALIANS might have had the edge when it came to style, but the Nazis were the masters of the art of using uniforms to define a person's place in society. All countries use uniforms and insignia to symbolise differences in rank or influence, but the Germans spread the concept beyond military and political organisations to most civilian bodies as well. Uniforms were also a psychologically important tool to the Nazis: the use of National Socialist symbols on the insignia, used by all state and local bodies, was indicative of the Party's octopus-like hold on every aspect of public life.

## SOME LIKE IT GREY

Most people will be familiar with the military regalia, rank badges and decorations of the Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS, and items worn by Nazi organisations such as the SA, the Hitler Youth and the Police are much sought after by collectors of militaria, but these were simply the tip of the iceberg. There were at least sixty-four distinct uniformed organisations, in Hitler's Germany, ranging from nationwide bodies such as the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* and the National Railway Service through volunteer organisations such as the German Red Cross down to specialised groupings

*Germany has long been a nation of uniforms, so when the paramilitary SA formations were banned from wearing their brown shirts it hit the Nazi Party hard. However, when they came to power they immediately Nazified the uniforms worn by civil organisations.*



# NAZI SYMBOLS



Above: An officer's peaked cap of the Technische Nothilfe – the Technical Emergency Service, or TeNo. Formed in 1919 as a strike-breaking organisation of ex-military engineers tasked with keeping essential services going, it evolved into a body of experts who could give advice in major civil emergencies.

Under the Nazis the TeNo was absorbed into the police, and during the war became closely associated with the Waffen-SS, being used for engineering work behind the front lines. Seen here are a unit right-hand collar patch, a rank left-hand collar patch worn by NCOs, a cuff-title and a triangular cloth cap badge.

such as the Deutschen Falkenorden and the Deutscher Jägerschaft – respectively responsible for falconry and hunting – and the National Stud Farms in East and West Prussia, officials of which had their own unique rank insignia.





Below: An officer's peaked visor cap of the Deutsches Rotes Kreuz – the German Red Cross or DRK. Although it was the German branch of the International League of the Red Cross, which had been founded in 1869, it had come into the Nazi orbit in 1939, when its organisation was centralised under the personal patronage of Adolf Hitler.



Above: A set of DRK insignia, comprising a belt buckle worn by volunteers and lower ranks, a cloth cap badge, and the silver-piped collar patch which was worn by all ranks up to DRK-Generalführer.

Below: In 1937, the nationalised but independently-run Deutsche Reichsbahn became a government agency. It was the largest enterprise in Germany, and one of the largest employers. The wartime insignia depicted below include an armband worn by helpers and officials, an arm badge and cuffband worn by a military liaison official in Brussels, and a collar patch introduced in 1942 for middle-ranking officials.







Above: An NSLB lapel button. The NS Lehrerbund, or National Socialist Teachers League, was the party organisation tasked with persuading Germany's educators to follow the Party line.

Right: A tunic worn by an Oberzollinspekteur of the Land Customs Service, working in administration. The letters RFV on the shoulder strap stand for Reichsfinanzverwaltung, or National Finance Administration. On the breast pocket are the Iron Cross First Class and the SA Sports Badge in Bronze.

Below: German postal, telegraph and telecommunications services were controlled by the Deutsche Reichspost. Officials wore blue tunics and caps, with orange piping and collar patches.







# Fortress Europe

**After Britain failed to come to terms, Hitler constructed a fortification line from Norway to the Pyrenees to deter Allied invaders.**

**I**MMEDIATELY AFTER the Fall of France in 1940, German forces occupied French naval installations and local defences. Later, after Britain refused to come to terms, field defences were dug along the coast and barbed wire entanglements and minefields positioned, defending beaches that might be used by amphibious raiders. Most of these positions were make-shift affairs, comprised of zigzag slit trenches.

In 1941 Hitler commissioned the over-burdened Reich's chief engineer, Fritz Todt, to assume

responsibility for constructing more permanent coastal defences. The *Organisation Todt* (OT) concentrated on providing reinforced concrete U-boat pens, Luftwaffe airfields and bases and coastal gun positions in the Pas de Calais. The four batteries in the Pas de Calais would cover the narrows of the Channel – the most likely invasion route – and subject Dover, Ramsgate and Folkestone to sporadic shell fire. The biggest guns, the three 40.6-cm guns in battery "Lindemann" at Sangatte could cover all three towns. "Hellfire Corner" as this area of England

was known would remain under threat until the late summer of 1944. Some of the guns had originally been emplaced to give supporting fire for *Fall Seelöwe* – Operation Sea Lion the proposed invasion of Britain in 1940.

## **NUISANCE RAIDS**

Thirteen coastal artillery batteries were eventually constructed along the French coast. There were also emplacements in Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Germany and Denmark.

Between June and September 1942, no further major construction work was





undertaken on coastal defences. Such was Hitler's confidence in final victory in the East.

Nevertheless, Britain did begin to mount nuisance raids from 1942. The attack at St Nazaire and the disastrous assault on Dieppe later that year gave added impetus to construction work on defences that Hitler had now given the sobriquet the *Atlantikwall* – Atlantic Wall.

## AMBITIOUS PROGRAMME

A construction programme was set up for the provision of 15,000 bunkers and emplacements. These coastal defences, later featured in propaganda films and photographs, eventually stretched some 2,685km from the Spanish border to the North Cape in Norway. They combined coastal artillery, to engage shipping offshore, and infantry and artillery positions, protected by minefields, flame-throwers and barbed wire that, it was intended, would destroy any troops and vehicles that managed to make a landing.

Some 17.3 million cubic tons of concrete and steel reinforcing bars went into the defences and vast armies of slave labourers lived and worked in appalling conditions to construct them. Labour was expendable and many lost their lives building precariously-placed observation posts on steep cliffs, and driving shafts deep into hillsides. The Germans were great tunnellers and hospitals, command posts, magazines and shelters were constructed by slave labourers deep within the living rock.

## BOMB-PROOF SHELTERS

Bunkers were all gas proof, with double doors and a manually operated filtration system. Though there was an entrance, normally an armoured door covered by a machine gun port, there was also an escape shaft, if the door was damaged. Behind the front line positions, the Germans built troop shelters in which men could take cover during heavy bombardments and emerge to deliver counter attacks.



Italian designs were adopted to create the 'Tobruk' which consisted of a shelter large enough to house up to four men. Up a short flight of steps was a circular concrete pit that could be fitted with a turret or left open as a light AA or machine gun position or mortar pit.

The Germans incorporated captured artillery, tanks and even anti-tank obstacles into the defences. Many of the coastal defence guns were captured French, Czech or Soviet pieces. Turrets from the French Renault FT-17 and R35 tanks were cemented into 'Tobruks', while the formidable Belgian 'Element C' or 'Belgian gate' steel girder anti-tank obstacles were positioned as anti-invasion obstacles on open beaches. Other obstacles included barbed wire, mines, ditches, 'Dragon's Teeth' concrete cubes, steel tetrahedrons, vertical steel girders and 'Czech Hedgehog' anti-tank obstacles.

In the light of experience at Dieppe, where Churchill tanks had been unable to mount the low sea wall, the Todt engineers designed *Panzermauer*; these were huge reinforced concrete walls two metres high and one metre thick that had anti-tank gun emplacements built into them. In some cases existing defences from the 19th Century were

*Above: For two years, a quarter of a million men worked night and day to build the massive defence system. More than a million tons of steel and twenty million cubic yards of concrete were used.*

*Opposite page: This photo from 'Signal', the German propaganda magazine, bore the caption: "This is why an enemy attack, even the most powerful and furious possible to imagine, is bound to fail."*

*Below: Field Marshal Erwin Rommel inspects the Atlantic Wall defences. Von Rundstedt used to say of Rommel: "When the invasion comes, he will certainly become more at peace in his mind."*



effectively incorporated.

## TROMPE L'OEIL

Camouflage included paint and garnished netting, however bunkers were sited to blend with the terrain and artificial landscaping further assisted concealment. Concrete was given a textured surface by ensuring the shuttering was not smooth and reinforcing rods were left exposed to allow netting to be hung. Stone cladding was used to

blend bunkers into cliffs or among buildings. Some gun positions that had been constructed on the sea front of a coastal town were painted with false windows and doors to resemble a bungalow or villa.

From January 1944 when Field Marshal Erwin Rommel took command of Army Group B, a new urgency was injected into defensive work along the coast. Rommel had discovered that the Atlantic Wall was far less





**Above:** Low tide reveals obstacles planted to impede the Allied invasion. Many were tipped with contact-mines to imperil Allied amphibious craft.

**Left:** Awaiting the inevitable! But just where and when was the huge armada, gathered on the other side of the Channel, going to be unleashed?

**Below:** This was the image of the Atlantic Wall that the Propaganda Ministry showed the people of Germany. The reality was very different from the myth. When Rommel arrived November 1943, he realised that the defences were far from complete. Although not finished by June 1944, the defences were much improved by his prodigious efforts.



formidable than the carefully chosen pictures emanating from Goebbels's Propaganda Ministry suggested.

Though important ports were well defended, other stretches of the coast remained vulnerable. The Germans only had finite resources which were directed towards likely assault areas. The British had sustained a deception plan suggesting that attacks would be launched against the Pas de Calais – it was after all the shortest route across the Channel. This had resulted in men, weapons and resources being diverted away from the D Day beaches at Normandy.

Under Rommel's guidance troops improvised landing craft obstacles using timber beams onto which Teller anti-tank mines, 10.5-cm artillery shells or simply sharp steel girders had been bolted. Inland, timber linked together with barbed wire was also used to block possible landing grounds for gliders and huge areas of farmland were flooded against paratroopers. Dummy positions were constructed to attract artillery air attacks.

By D day on 6 June 1944 the responsibility for engaging targets onshore or offshore was divided between the *Kriegsmarine* –

German Navy – and *Das Heer* – the Army – who defended the beaches and harbours. The naval gunners manned the guns that fired on shipping, and had their own spotting and fire control system. The architecture reflected the Navy's concern for efficient operation of weapons and equipment. Radar and range finders were housed in tall multi-storey towers, similar in concept to the fighting top on capital ships while guns had ammunition stored in magazines that were incorporated into the bunker.

The Army favoured dispersed positions, with observation posts linked to batteries by

underground cable and ammunition stored in separate bunkers. The embrasures on naval gun emplacements faced out to sea to give a wide field of fire. Those on Army coastal casemates were configured to cover beaches and were screened from the sea by massive concrete walls. On long exposed beaches, notably the Omaha D Day beach, infantry and artillery positions were dug on bluffs and headlands or built in dunes to deliver interlocking fire along the length of the flat sand.

The arrangement that split responsibility for defence between the Army and the Navy might seem rather complex. But it was driven by a simple logic; the men of the *Kriegsmarine* could accurately identify Allied and German warships, whereas Army gunners might in error, cause damage or casualties through misidentification by a "blue on blue" engagement or "friendly fire". Such concerns never materialised, as the German Navy was swept from the Channel by massive Allied forces.

## BREACH IN THE LINE

By June 1944 there were 700 distinct designs of bunker, command post or shelter in the Atlantic Wall. A typical battery layout consisted of the *Leitstand* (fire control panel), the *Schartenstand* (covered gun emplacements), army standard crew accommodation and ammunition stores. Within the perimeter of the battery were latrines, cook houses, water tanks, and a first aid post. These buildings were either built from





## Defending the Islands

**T**HE GERMAN OCCUPATION of the Channel Islands served a dual purpose: the islands were a useful strategic point for the invasion of mainland Britain and were also of immense propaganda value. The Wehrmacht consequently devoted considerable resources to prevent their early recapture. In 1941, the 319th Infantry Division, strengthened by armoured units and coastal artillery was committed to the islands. Five months later, Hitler issued orders for the permanent fortification of the Channel Islands and committed *Organization Todt* to supervising the programme of 'Atlantik Wall' defences.

The backbone of these defences was provided by the medium and heavy artillery batteries of the army and navy, totalling some 65 guns, whose task was to engage sea targets under the control of the artillery commander. These heavy batteries were a vital link in the chain of defences and reduced the need for intensive fortification of the nearby French coast.

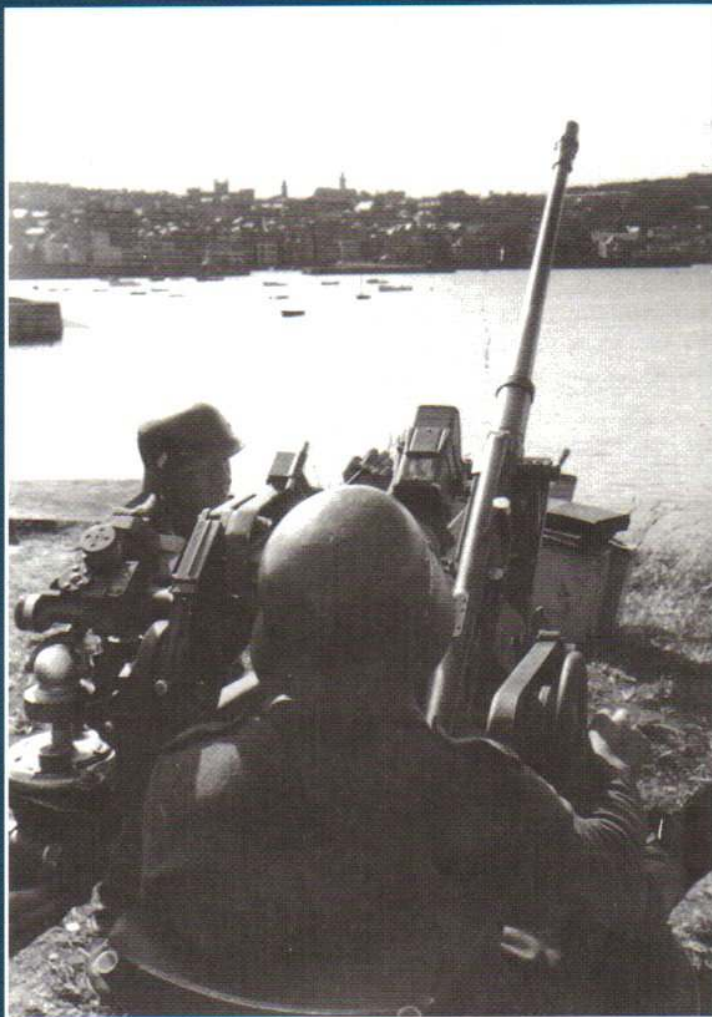
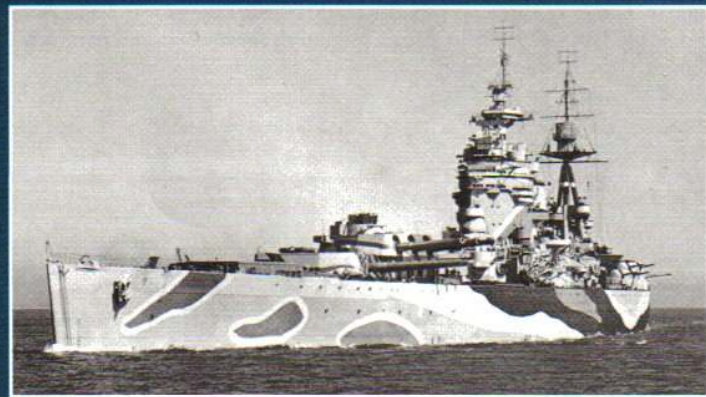
The islands were the most heavily fortified part of the Atlantic Wall. The plans called for 414 reinforced concrete structures for Guernsey, 234 for Jersey and 153 for Alderney. Tunnels and underground chambers would provide 50,000 square metres of cover, while 20,000 running metres of anti-tank walls and field railways would protect and serve the islands. It was a tough objective, but at the height of operations in May 1943, 25,500 cubic metres of rock had been excavated and in September that year, 40,881 cubic metres of reinforced concrete had been utilised. By the end of the war the defences had consumed over 613,000 cubic metres of concrete.

To build these fortifications, the *Organization Todt* brought in increasing numbers of forced labourers, including Soviet POWs, from all parts of occupied Europe. In May 1943, there were 5,100 labourers in Guernsey alone. They were housed in temporary camps scattered throughout the island. The imported workers and the German island-garrison, increased Guernsey's pre-war population of 24,000 by an additional 20,000. But Hitler's planning came to nought. The Allies simply bypassed these heavily defended islands which became an increasing anachronism as the tide of liberation swept across France.



*Left: A soldier keeps watch over the Channel. With the exception of the bombardment from HMS Rodney, no concerted attack ever came. The Allies could afford to bypass the islands and focus on their main priority – France.*

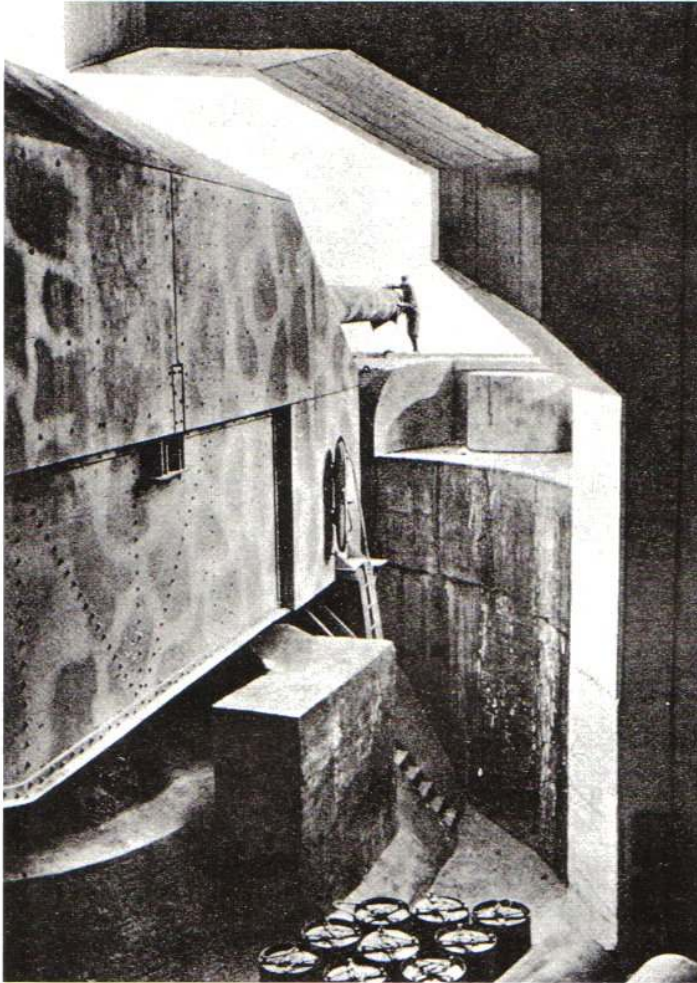
*Below: HMS Rodney flagship of the Home Fleet was a 33,300 ton battleship. With nine 406-mm (16-in) guns all grouped forward, she was the most powerful ship in the Royal Navy. But her attack on Guernsey's Batterie Blücher achieved nothing.*



*Top: A Navy light flak gun covers St Peter Port in Guernsey. Aerial defense of the island was assured by 16 coastal batteries of 36 8.8-cm anti-aircraft guns, supported by numerous light batteries of 3.7-cm and 2-cm guns, totalling 1,850 by May 1943.*

*Above: The Channel Islands were the only part of Great Britain that Germany ever occupied. Its propaganda value was taken into account in the decision to invest so much time, money and manpower to its defence.*





*Above: This battery was named after Fritz Todt who was initially charged with building the Atlantic Wall. Todt was killed in a plane crash 8 February 1942. All his responsibilities, including the wall, passed to Albert Speer.*



*Far Left: Some coastal batteries, remaining in the so-called 'Fortress ports' laying in the wake of the Allied advance, continued to harass Allied shipping. The majority of the batteries fell once the Wall had been breached and they were invested from behind.*

*Right: A total of 5,700,000 mines were planted by the German army along the coast of Northern France. These were buried on the beaches, the hinterland and in shallow waters to slow down the Allied landings.*

timber, bricks or concrete panels. For close in defence the Army used bunkers with interlocking fields of fire. On the outer fringes were slit trenches and 'Tobruks' and beyond that, minefields and belts of barbed wire, sited to funnel attackers towards machine guns and direct fire weapons.

## BEYOND THE WALL

Though Rommel realised that an Allied landing would have to be stopped on the beaches and urged soldiers to increase their defences, his superior Field Marshal von Rundstedt thought that a battle of manoeuvre in France would be decisive. This resulted in armoured formations and reinforcements being held too far back from the coast. Once the crust of the Atlantic Wall had been broken the whole line of defences became redundant and the mobile forces were unable to make their way to the coast as

Allied fighters and bombers strafed the convoys and columns on the French roads.

Some of the more heavily protected ports and the Channel Islands were left to 'wither on the vine' by the Allies following the invasion of Normandy. With limited offensive capability, but massive defences they did not constitute a threat. However, Allied logistics were placed under some strain by only having a limited number of ports available to them. In 1945 the French ports of Lorient, St Nazaire, La Palisse and La Rochelle were still in German hands as were the Channel Islands.

The Islands had a total of 16 coastal defence batteries as well as heavy and light Flak positions. The most powerful guns were at the 'Mirus' battery on Guernsey that consisted of four captured Russian 30.5-cm guns located at Le Frie Baton on the west of the

island. With radar locating, the guns could engage targets at ranges up to 32km.

In June 1944 with US troops now in control of the Cotentin peninsula and Cherbourg neutralised by an assault from the south, the 15-cm guns of *Batterie Blücher* on Alderney opened fire on the north west corner of the peninsula. Since the Flak protection was very dense over the island, the Allies decided against bombing but deployed the battleship HMS Rodney to assault the battery with her 16-inch gun main armament. Interestingly, though the German guns were in open pits the damage was minimal.

## STORMING WALCHEREN

The last battle of the Atlantic Wall came on 1 November 1944 when in Operation Infatuate the men of No 4 Commando Brigade landed at Westkapelle on

Walcheren supported by an infantry brigade landing at Flushing. The operation backed up by a land assault by 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions was necessary to clear the approaches to the port of Antwerp. The fighting lasted until 8 November. The German coastal batteries and bunkers had been manned with determination, but the combined fire power of RAF bomber command, that breached the dikes and flooded the island, and naval gunfire finally defeated them.

The assault on the Atlantic Wall came at a great price – for both sides. 21,259 men were killed, 51,729 reported missing and 85,729 were wounded.

Sixty years after they were built, to huge and expensive to remove, many of the bunker and battery positions remain intact, – chilling testaments to the battles that raged around them in the summer of 1944.



*The Allied invasion began in Normandy on D-Day (6 June 1944). With 4,126 landing vehicles and 2,316 transport vehicles the Allies established the second front in Europe. Allied air forces flew 14,674 missions on the first day alone and by 18 June, they were able to land 619,000 soldiers and 95,000 vehicles. The Atlantic Wall, despite its formidable reputation, had proved only to be a 'paper tiger'.*





**IN THIS VOLUME OF**  
**HITLER'S**  
**Third Reich**



**NAZI HORRORS**  
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**HITLER'S HENCHMEN**  
Erich von Manstein was Hitler's best general. No one was more aware of this than Manstein himself.

**SECRET HITLER FILES**  
As the war turned against Hitler, the Führer retreated from view to inhabit a twilight world. He abused and abandoned the faith of those who had followed him.



**HITLER'S BATTLES**  
The 'soft-underbelly' of Europe remained an intractable problem for Eisenhower. Germany denied the Allies final victory until it made no difference.

**INSIDE THE THIRD REICH**  
WWII was a war of attrition. The country that built the most weapons would inevitably win. But Germany could not keep up with her rivals.

**WAR MACHINE**  
After Britain failed to come to terms, Hitler appointed his engineers to construct a fortification line from Norway to the Pyrenees to deter Allied invaders.